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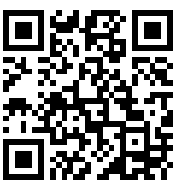

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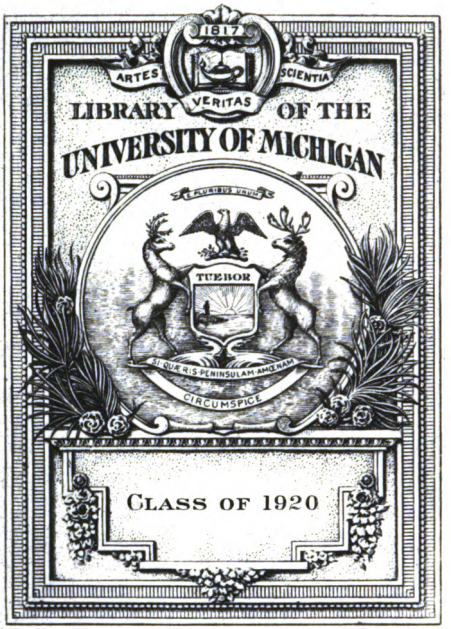


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# THE
# WAR LETTERS
# OF A
# LIGHT INFANTRYMAN.

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# THE
# WAR LETTERS
# OF A
# LIGHT INFANTRYMAN

BY

CAPT. J. E. H. NEVILLE, M.C.
(late 43rd Light Infantry)

*With a Sketch Map showing*
*the Positions on the Vaga.*

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1930

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To

THE OFFICERS,

WARRANT OFFICERS, NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS,

BUGLERS AND PRIVATES

WHO HAD THE HONOUR TO SERVE IN THE

43RD AND 52ND LIGHT INFANTRY

DURING THE WAR, 1914 TO 1919

AND TO THOSE NOW SERVING,

THIS BOOK IS

DEDICATED.

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Σπάρτην ἔλαχες, τήνδε κόσμει.

Cicero. Ep. ad Atticum. iv 6

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# NOTE.

IN July 1914, I was looking forward to "those" last two years at Eton: but, a year later, as soon as I was eighteen, I went to Sandhurst, and I was nineteen when I started writing these letters.

In the originals, of course, the names of towns, billets, trenches and sectors in France were not mentioned. These have been supplied either from my diary or the Regimental Chronicles, where the former failed. No restrictions, however, were imposed upon us in the naming of places in our letters from Russia.

The initials prefixed to each letter are those of my Father or one of my two sisters.

J. E. H. NEVILLE.

*November, 1930.*

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*M.K.N.*

55 *Infantry Base Depot,*

7.12.16. *Rouen.*

Here I am, at last, in France! We had an excellent crossing on Tuesday night, landed yesterday, and came on here by train in the afternoon. We left Purbrook very lively; in fact, I'm afraid some of us were a bit blotto. No matter.

We shall probably be stuck down here for some time, doing a short course. Harry Spurge, Dowson, Chevallier, Cope, and I are going to the 52nd, the remainder to the 6th Battalion. It's rather rotten luck being separated like this from the rest of the party, but I am very glad to be going to the 52nd, especially as Harry is coming too. We had a great send-off from Cosham Station; practically all the officers from Purbrook and Cambridge Barracks came down. The Colonel alone, did not turn up to see us off.

*R.J.N.N. Sloley, Norfolk.*

55 *Infantry Base Depot,*

12.12.16 *Rouen.*

I wonder if you have got any of my letters; none have come here so far. I suppose it takes a good long time for letters to get back home. I long to hear from you all, and I suppose I shall soon, if I wait. All is well here and we are as gay as could be. As I told you, I think, we are doing a 6 days course of everything I've been doing for the last 10 months. We are accommodated in so-called huts which are less waterproof than tents. There is no room to put one's kit except on nails on the walls, and the rain drips through and on to one's breeches and shirt, which is very annoying. Huts are only made of canvas nailed to uprights. It's very cold out here and abominably wet, but I manage to keep dry in my trench coat, and my big boots are an absolute godsend. We work from 8 a.m. till 3 p.m. with an hour's break for lunch. You would laugh to see us, i.e. Dick Warren, Dowson, Harry Spurge and me sitting in pools of water trying to open a tin of bully beef and picking sardines out on the end of rusty penknives. I believe I shall have to be inoculated again. I think it is best not to risk typhoid; though at Sandhurst, the Medical Officer said our doses would last for two years. At present we are off parade because of the heavy fall of snow, and the water lying about is even too terriffic for us to march about in. Heaven only knows what it must be like up in the line—this place is a sea of mud and I suppose it's feet deep in the line.



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What is your opinion of the new Government? Anyway the majority of posts seem to be held by Tories. We don't get papers for two days after issue. It's like reading back numbers of *The Times*.

This place I came to with that draft I brought over and of which I talked to you (Rouen). The cathedral is certainly magnificent, more so, to my mind, from the outside than inside. The architecture, of course, is incomparable, and the perpendicular arches are the best I've seen, I think; but somehow Roman Catholic Churches lack the air of quiet solemnity which is so characteristic of ours. I can't abide the different coloured candles and the ugly confessionals—it's all too tawdry. I suppose the spire is an addition, isn't it? Like the pots on Lupton's Tower. By the way, has that water-colour of m'tutor's alley arrived yet? On the whole, I think it would look best in my room at Sloley.

How is Toby (Sturges)? Do go and see him at Millbank and give him my best love. Well, good-bye, and do write. I long for news from home.

*M.K.N.* 25, *Eccleston Sq., S.W.*

55 *Infantry Base Depot,*

16.12.16. *Rouen.*

I was beginning to wonder if I was ever going to get a letter from you; and now one has come and, I hope, plenty more soon.

I am not doing much at present. We are waiting to join the 52nd, having finished our course. We may be here a week longer, and, on the other hand, we may be shunted off at any moment; then, of course, my address will change. Like a silly fool, I never left my address with you though I knew all the time that we were pretty certain to come here.

This place seems to be deluged with rain at intervals of every half hour and the mud is pretty thick. But it is good training for the future, and my boots keep out the wet splendidly. By the way, I have found some splendid socks which reach to my knee and are lined with cotton wool, very warm and soft. Also, I went down to the Ordnance and bought a most beautiful British warm, lined with sheepskin which keeps me splendidly warm and cosy.

We are living in comparative luxury, but there are parades all day in any old weather. This morning, we went for a short route march of five or six miles through glorious pine woods. The road was quite straight, and one could see nothing but these lean gaunt trees, stretching for miles on all sides, while



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the ground was strewn with many-tinted fallen leaves. It really was most enjoyable, but inclined to be wet and extremely muddy. The country round here reminds me very much of Camberley and the thick pine woods. To think that, this time last year, I was warned that I was going to pass out ; a whole year of war which seems so short and yet so inexpressibly long.

Harry Spurge and I are going down, tomorrow, for an evening service in Rouen Cathedral. I think it might be rather impressive and Harry rather appreciates ritual. I don't know if you ever realised that, at one time, he was sapping for Holy Orders.

I think the 52nd will be in billets for Christmas and, I expect in that case, we shall have the hell of a good time. I hear now, that all Christmas leave has been stopped in England, in which case we are better off out here.

To-day, a man in the Regiment joined the Base, who was in the attack on Beaumont-Hamel in which Toby Sturges was wounded. His name is Booth. I don't think I've introduced him to you. He is such a nice chap, but so different from what he was when he first went out. I expect you will see a difference in me when I come back.

Best love and good wishes to you all for Christmas and the New Year.

*R.J.N.N.*

*December* 18*th*, 1916.

We are now in the train going up to join the Regiment. We started from Rouen this afternoon leaving poor Dick Warren behind to go to the 6th Battalion. There are three of of us in this carriage, 2nd class and most evil-smelling. Harry Spurge is in great form with his Balaclava helmet on. He wishes to be remembered very sincerely to you. We managed to get some food at Rouen station from a canteen run by English ladies. It was a treat to speak to an English lady; and they were so kind. I have eaten the best sandwich I've ever tasted, bought from their stall; a good thick roll with layers of ham in between. Harry looks like one of Bruce Bairnsfather's pictures at the present moment.

This carriage is in a filthy state and we have got our valises stacked up at one end where the centre window lacks its glass. A candle in a lantern slung between the two racks serves as our light and a very inadequate one too. The train is not what we should call in England, rapid, but resembles more the old-fashioned growler. We bump along at two miles an hour which, I am told, is fast for a troop train. There are a good many men on board, accommodated merely in cattle



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trucks and the poor devils have got to make shift as best they can. We are now stopping at one of the many points in between stations where the engine driver knows of a comfortable estaminet. The humorous part about these halts is that, apparently, the driver overshoots the pub sometimes and has to back the train so as not to have to walk too far. By the way, I met Ben Cherry at the station, taking a draft of the 60th up to the line. He has been down with jaundice since he came out, early in September.

We are all so cheery as we sit now; but God knows if we can keep it up. I hope so. Dowson is with Harry and me.

(Here a rough sketch of Spurge).

This is rather a bad drawing of Harry asleep in the corner of the carriage. The face is very bad but the rest suggests, more or less, the amount of clothing he has thrown round him.

Well, I must end now. Best love.

*B.H.A.N.*

*December 19th,* 1916. *Fontaine-sur-Maye.*

Here I am with the Regiment at last. We came up from the Base yesterday. We were warned to report at the station at 2.30 p.m. We arrived like Christmas trees and were told to get into a wagon with "2nd Division" chalked on it. We walked about 600 yards up the train and, needless to say, found no carriage. We managed, eventually to ensconce ourselves in a second class compartment in which some previous traveller had thought fit to disgorge his last meal. The odour thereof remained till the end of the journey.

We played poker for a little while, but there was not enough light from the solitary candle so we gave it up.

We reached Abbeville at about 4 a.m., some going! From there we came on to a small station, St. Riquier, dumped our valises, and went into a village where we got some café au lait and an omelette. A mule wagon took us to Brigade Headquarters going at a walk the whole way, and there we got a lorry which brought us to the Regiment.

We have got an excellent mess and I have quite a comfortable billet. Harry Spurge and I are in the same Company for the present.

Jasper Wyld is coming over on Christmas Day.

*M.K.N.*

24.12.16. *Fontaine-sur-Maye.*

Christmas Eve! I am writing this in bed, in my small billet, most comfortable in every way. My window is open, for it is a warm night. As in most French cottages, this room



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is mostly taken up with the bed. The room is about 6 foot by 6 foot and I can only lie at full length across the bed. The window looks on to the inevitable manure heap. The inhabitants seem to recognise the muck heap as the family jewel, and that is why, I suppose, they keep it so near to the house.

There is very little news to tell you, I have been riding a lot since I came up. We all mount very queer steeds, some of them shaggy pack animals with very little life in them.

As Harry Spurge and I were walking back from the glare of the mess lamps, plodding our way through the mud and slush, I said to him: "For all we are doing, we might be in England." He turned to me and pointed over to the right. I looked, and the sky and the inky trees were lit up every other second by yellow flashes coming from far away. Flash, flash, flash; yet not a single sound to disturb the stillness of the night. And then, I seemed to realise, that probably, each one of those flashes might mean that some poor man, friend or foe, was being blown to bits. And there, over in the north-east, sitting in mud and water, are the men who have been fighting for us up till now; to them to-morrow means no more than to-day.

I know that I have got to go through it, and all I pray is that I may stick it as well as the others before me.

*B.H.A.N.*

*January 2nd,* 1917. *Fontaine-sur-Maye.*

I have been riding a lot since I have been up with the 52nd, and even now I am about to go over to that famous little town (Crecy). You were rather a scholar in history as far as I can remember, so you would know all about the battle of 1346. We walked over the ground on Christmas Day and it was very interesting to think of the great battle that was fought on it 500 years ago. There is a little stream running alongside the road with water cress (Crecy) in it.

Yesterday I played football for "B" against "C" Company. We were rather badly beaten, and I am afraid I was not in any way an asset. One part of the ground was half under water, and I happened to be the right wing and spent most of the afternoon wallowing in the mud and water. Luckily I was able to borrow the Padre's bath after the game.

There was a torchlight procession last night up and down Piccadilly, the main street of this village. It was very pretty and effective. The Divisional Band and our buglers played the dear old marches. There was a concert in the marquee afterwards, and a sketch, taking off Charlie Chaplin, was quite good.

Yours till hell freezes.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*January 7th*, 1917. *Fontaine-sur-Maye.*

I suppose you know, now, where we are in billets. Jean of Luxembourg, not Charles, was killed at the battle of Crecy. The battlefield is very interesting when you think that a quarrel was settled there in a few hours while we have been fighting for 2½ years and not decided ours yet!

I have just returned from a three days' gas course in a neighbouring village. I met an officer in the 23rd Royal Fusiliers who was a most temporary gentleman. He got on to the subject of Eton and started running down the traditions and dress, etc. I choked him off by saying that traditions make a school just as they make a regiment. He replied by making remarks about the 52nd's traditions which made my blood boil, and I fear I was rather rude. A man like that gives himself away badly, because he shows at once that he has not got the spirit of his regiment, or he would not run down another better than his own. Heaven help the Army if chaps of his kidney are going to be its officers of the future.

I had a long and delightful letter from m'tutor. Maurice Buxton, the last link as m'tutor calls him, has left. There is no one now whom I know, though I only left eighteen months ago.

Never be anxious on my account because I know I shall come through all right. It is no worse for me than it is for you at home. You have the anxiety, while I have the fun; and, however unpleasant conditions may be, they are all good fun to look back on. Remember what I said to you as that train steamed out of Waterloo. I'll keep my contract and you keep yours, and all will be well. My end is well up. The only thing that I'm not certain about, is whether I may not get the wind up and show it. I'm afraid of being afraid. If I can control myself, I think all will be well, but that is my misgiving and a natural one. I know we are going to have a stiff time, but all the better; I shall have plenty to do, and I sha'nt be the only one who has not been under fire before.

*M.K.N.*

*Jan. 8th*, 1917. *Prouville.*

We have been trekking all day from Fontaine-sur-Maye. We had a pretty good march and only two men of "B" Company fell out. It was very cold at the halts; and I was very unaccustomed to my pack and all the weight in it. My boots began to rub me too, but I rectified that. We are now in billets and settled for the night.



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I have to thank you for the medicine chest, and two letters. They were all waiting for me when we arrived here.

I am glad you like "Houp-la." I enjoyed it very much, but can't remember much about it, because, I'm afraid, we were rather blotto. I remember the pun on Blewitt. George Graves is extremely funny

There is the hell of a babel going on now; everyone is shouting, singing, eating, drinking, and it is very hard to concentrate on a letter.

I hope you understood what I meant when I said that I enjoyed this Christmas more than any for three years. As you know ours were pretty gloomy, weren't they?

We have had a rattling good time up to the present. The plum pudding and cake have gone due west, I fear. The Base does not allow all good things to slip through its fingers.

*M.K.N.* 25, *Eccleston Square, S.W.*

*Jan.* 12*th*, 1917. *Rubempré.*

The gramophone is now playing Rachmaninoff's Prelude out of tune. Nevertheless, it reminds me of the old days at Sloley, and 25. We are still on the road up, marching 10 or 12 miles per day. We are moving from this comfortable little village to-day, to go to another, only 2 miles away. Rather rot having to pack up everything to go that distance.

I was warned to-day that I shall probably be attached to the Royal Engineers while the Division is in the line. I do so hate being separated from the Regiment and my men. However, it has not been confirmed yet. I hope I shall be spared it, although sapping must be very interesting work, and I expect that I shall have a lot of work to do. The choice lies between Warren and me, and the Colonel has still to make his decision.

I rather like marching across country like this, from one village to another; it might be a walking tour, except for the proximity of the guns. From here you can hear the strafes going on, although we are still a good long way from the line.

The Regimental March is now being played. It is a curious fact that, when we move and occupy a new mess, the first thing to be seen is the gramophone. It is ubiquitous and makes things very cheery.

*B.H.A.N.*

*Wolf Huts.*

*January* 14*th*, 1917. *Ovillers-la-Boiselle.*

Many things have happened since I wrote to you last. On the 12th we moved again to Rubempré, not far from our



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ultimate destination, and yesterday we paraded at 8.30 a.m. to come up here in motor buses. Needless to say, there were not enough to take the whole Regiment, and as we were the rear Company, we were left behind.

Harry Spurge and I spent the morning in a little estaminet where we bought a plentiful supply of liqueur chocolates. We then went to another little place, excessively smelly, and had an omelette, taking care not to look at the pan it was cooked in!

At 2 p.m. we "embused" and drove for miles over most desolate country. We passed through Albert, where the statue of the Virgin holding the Child on the top of the cathedral has been knocked half over. It leans down at a most perilous angle right over the road, and I could look up into the face of the figure over my head. It certainly is a miracle that it has not fallen. The French say that when it does fall, the war will end.

By the time we reached this spot, it was getting dark, and the whole sky was lit up by the flashes of the guns. We are in huts just behind the old German front line of 1916 at the side of the Albert road.

This morning, after a very cold night in my flea-bag, I had to wash in shell-hole water, and I don't think I have ever experienced such cold. After breakfast I went out and surveyed the land. The whole place is simply torn up into a mass of shell-holes. I had a look at the German front line; there was practically nothing left of it; the communication trenches and parapets were blown to hell. The ground all round is littered with shell cases, bombs, grenades, and duds of every kind, and here and there a little wooden cross marks some poor chap's grave. There is one such just outside the mess.

As I was returning from my sight-seeing, I saw a boot sticking out of the ground. I kicked it and then saw a piece of khaki puttee attached. It gave me rather a nasty turn.

You can see where little copses once stood by the presence of a few stumps and blasted tree trunks. A modern battlefield, though very interesting, is not very pleasant.

There is a big gun not 200 yards from the mess which occasionally fires and shakes everything. Luckily, it only goes off now and again. Last night it kept quiet, thank heaven.

To-morrow, I am going to be attached to the 226th Field Company R.E. for a little while; anyway, not for more than a month, I hope. I shan't be actually in the front line except for working parties.

There goes another shell on its mission of mercy! I wish it wasn't so close. There it goes again. Bang—fthiz-z-z-, ! like an Underground train going out of a station. The whole hut rattles when it goes off.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*Wolf Huts.*

*January 15th, 1917.* *Ovillers-la-Boiselle.*

We are now in support, in huts not three miles from the front line as the crow flies. We covered the last lap in "General" Buses painted black. These huts are just behind the original German second line, and on the left of the Bapaume-Albert road

Griffith-Williams and I made a tour of the battlefield. We found a few stumps of trees marking a copse of days gone by, a few ruins where a village once stood, a great many wooden crosses, and here and there an uncovered boot and leg protruding from the ground, a great many bits of shell, and much ammunition, both English and German. We also had a look at a derelict tank, which was very interesting. I tried to get inside, but my shoulders were too broad; and as the mud was over ankle-deep all round the brute, we came away. Next, we looked at the crater of the mine which was blown up behind the German line on July 1st. It took 10 months to make, and I am not surprised; and so far holds the record for being the biggest exploded in this war. We reckoned that it was 120 feet across and nearly 80 feet deep. Apparently, the mine was well below the German dug-outs. It is simply colossal.

The ground outside the mess is torn up by shell-holes which are now water-logged, and the mud has to be seen to be believed. The whole landscape is one of utter desolation, and, although very interesting, it is also very sad.

Harry Spurge went up the line last night to reconnoitre with the other Captains of Companies. He got lost and had an awful time, but seemed not to mind the shelling at all. As I write he is recounting his experiences of last night. He says that our worst enemy is the mud and water, and that owing to the awful conditions the Hun is recognising the Red Cross, which seems too good to be true.

The Huns sent over some shells last night searching for our guns just in front of these huts. The whole night long there was one long cannonade, but it did not stop me sleeping. The flashes at night are most thrilling, and light up the whole sky.

The officers in this mess are damned good fellows; and we enjoy ourselves very much. No one is allowed to be depressed. We are a band of brothers.

*R.J.N.N.*

*January 20th, 1917.* *Bouzincourt.*

Many things have happened since I received your last letter. What I have experienced since the 16th, I shall never



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forget as long as I live. I could write reams telling you all I felt and did.

Perhaps it would be interesting to you to hear of my first experiences under fire, and our tour of the trenches, if you could call them such.

Well, we paraded on the 16th at 4.30 p.m., and marched up to a distributing hut near Pozières to draw thigh gum boots. Unfortunately, I could not get a pair quite big enough for me, so I had to content myself with a pair of nines. On the way up we were shelled with lachrymatory gas which had no ill effects, except to make our eyes water and cause a choking feeling at the back of one's throat, and to make breathing rather uncomfortable. I was carrying besides my equipment, my ankle boots and a sandbag of rations for two days.

We had to halt for a good long time at a spot near the ruined village of Pozières while another regiment passed us. It was getting very late, and also it was freezing at the time.

It was while we were waiting here that a man in the passing regiment fell into a shell-hole full of water, and, being heavily equipped and having all his ammunition to weigh him down, very nearly went under for good. That is one of the dangers of going up into the line by night; and sometimes, when it's very dark, you can't spot which hole the man has fallen into.

On moving off, we took a duckboard track which made marching much easier. The men were very heavily laden and had their rations to carry too. It was while we were going along this track that I nearly lost our (officers') loaf of bread which rolled out of the sandbag into a shell-hole. Luckily I was able to find it. Harry Spurge and I were the only officers of "B" Company.

We left the duckboards at "C" Dump, which the Hun delights in shelling of a night, but he was quite quiet while we were passing, thank heaven. Up to this point progress had been pretty easy, but as soon as we got off the duckboards it was nothing more nor less than hell. The gum boots had no grip on the ground, and we went along floundering up to our waists in mud, slipping up and falling into shell-holes full of water, and all the while my ankle boots swung in between my legs, and the ration bag grew heavier with every step.

The guides of the regiment which we were to relieve missed the track and took us about half a mile out of our way. Men got stuck so deep in the mud that it took three others to pull them out, and as I was in the rear of the column, all these jobs devolved on me. More than once the men had their gum boots sucked off in the mud and continued in their socks! Then too, every time a man fell into a water-logged shell-hole his rations went with him, and these were often left at the bottom.

It was about 11 p.m. when we turned about and retraced



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our steps to try and find the right path. The difficulty of the going exhausted the men, and I, too, felt done up to the eyes. Luckily, I had your flask quite handy and took a swig which bucked me up a great deal. Just before we turned off on to our right track, I saw a body lying covered by a waterproof sheet. It was poor Nick Hill who had been killed by shrapnel leading "A" Company into the front line.

We finally reached our destination at about 3.30 a.m., having taken eleven hours on the way. Harry and I were in the Headquarters post and I crawled into the shelter which was about 12 feet long, 3 feet broad, and 4 feet high. To get in I had to go on hands and knees. It was made of semi-circular sheets of corrugated iron, had neither sandbags nor earth above it, and mud oozed from the joints. A whizz-bang or bullet would go straight through it.

At the far end Harry and I made shift for the night wedged in together so tightly that we could scarcely move.

Before turning in, we went round our posts. There was now a covering of snow on the ground which obliterated the shell-holes and concealed the track, as well as making the going rather treacherous.

The Hun, in this part of the line, is really quite friendly and never strafes us unless we strafe him. There seems to be a mutual understanding between us. Here is an instance of this.

On our return journey from visiting the posts we completely lost our way in the snow. We came upon a post and Harry, thinking that it was one of ours, gave the pass word. There was no answer. "Rum," said Harry again. As there was no answer, I covered the sentry with my revolver. Then, I noticed a couple of men dart towards what I took to be a machine gun, though I could not see for certain in the murk. I whispered to Harry that I thought it was time for us to go elsewhere, and we made off hastily. In my haste I tripped over something and fell flat on my face in the snow and found myself staring into the sunken eyes of a very old Boche. He was half covered in snow and very dead, but that sight gave me an awful shock. It turned out that we had visited a German post! How easily they could have shot us or made us prisoners.

It took us some time to find our line, for even our footmarks were covered by the falling snow, so that we could not retrace our steps. It was a funny feeling to be lost in No Man's Land.

We eventually found our Headquarters and found that we had been away for two hours. I was amazed; it seemed as if we had been out for about half an hour!



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All this I wrote in a Boche dug-out at Courcelette, when "B" was in support. Now we are in billets and quite comfortable. Nick Hill was our only casualty during the tour. He was hit in the head, carotid artery, heart and stomach. It was, of course, an instantaneous death. But it is beyond me to believe that he has gone. He was a charming chap, quite young and brilliant as a soldier. His wit often kept the mess going on occasions of general depression.

"B" Company was relieved on the night of the 16th. Before that I visited the posts and got lost in No Man's Land again! This time I saved myself by my compass. Luckily, I had been along the "top" to take a bearing during the day.

The Hun always relieves the front line by day, and saunters along with his hands in his pockets from post to post. On the 18th a party of them came quite close to us and waved their arms, and, at one post, asked our men to come and have a drink by holding a bottle of beer over their heads so that we could all see. They seem quite genuine in their invitations, because they are never armed.

I simply longed to have a shot at some of them to pay off a few scores, but it only meant that we should have been sniped or taken prisoner on our lone visits to the posts at night. I believe that if you were lost in this sector the Hun would lead you back to your own line.

We got down to the support line quite safely on the 18th, but having been wet and frozen for two days, standing up to my knees in water filmed with cat-ice and in a rather tight pair of gum boots, I really felt that life was scarcely worth living. But when I descended into a warm dug-out and saw a bright brazier burning, I nearly wept for pure joy of being really alive and thawing! I think we were all frozen in our brains as well as our bodies.

When we were going up, I had some doubts as to my sensations under fire, but I had none, strange to say. The only time I felt at all funny was at 6.30 a.m. on the 17th. We had had no sleep all night, and the Huns started shelling us and our guns replied. The strafe lasted three quarters of an hour. I had a shivery feeling and, try as I would, I simply could not control that shivering! Harry said, "It's very cold, isn't it?" and I said, "Yes, I can't keep warm!!" We both had the wind up, but I don't think we betrayed it.

I moved with my platoon on the 19th from Brigade Headquarters to Courcelette dug-outs as there was insufficient accommodation for my men. We occupied a fine set of Boche dug-outs about 30 feet below the surface. It was bitterly cold and the bed I shared consisted of a few boards, on which,



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evidently, the Hun had had a feather mattress.

When I got back from the front line, I could not feel my big toe and my feet were aching like hell. Straith, a Canadian officer, pulled off my boots, looked at my toe, and rushed out and fetched some snow and rubbed it vigorously. It was a greenish white colour and deeply grained like tripe in a butcher's shop. He and I both thought it was frost-bitten, but I kept it in a sandbag of snow and thawed it gradually, a process which was far from pleasant. It is all right now, I am thankful to say, for to be frost-bitten is a court-martial offence.

We were relieved yesterday afternoon, and marched back here without any mishap. The roads were like ice, and the men slipped and fell about like skittles. We actually reached these billets at 12.30 a.m. this morning.

Thank you most awfully for the *Hamlet*. I read your first set of *Times* Broadsheets in my little shelter in the front line, and enjoyed them very much. I had no other literature on me and found them very welcome.

I got into bed at about 1.15 a.m. this morn, and slept till noon. It was sheer exhaustion that laid me out because I am in excellent condition.

This mess grows more delightful every day.

P.S.—From reading this through, you will probably think that I have made myself out to be a hero. Far from it. At the time it was pretty bloody, but we could get in a laugh at the old Hun. In fact, the whole thing was a farce, except for the conditions under which we had to act it.

*M.K.N.*

24.1.17. *Bouzincourt.*

I have to thank you for two letters which I got when we arrived back here after marching all night from the line. The fact that I had had no sleep for four days made that march terrible; in fact I nearly went to sleep along the road while marching. The road was most awfully slippery; the snow had frozen into ice, and the poor men were falling about and, I am sure, some of them must have hurt themselves; but as we were going out, they all realised that it was not worth while falling out. I was right in the rear, and had to help them along and carry their kit.

I went into Amiens yesterday in a staff car which broke down half way there. It was bitterly cold waiting for her to be put right. However, we bought a gramophone and liqueur chocolates!



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*B.H.A.N.*

*January 29th,* 1917. *Ovillers-la-Boiselle.*

I have to thank you for two letters which came to-day from the 226th R.E. Thank goodness, I'm off that job.

You seem to know exactly where we are. I suppose Jasper told you when he was on leave. He came over and saw us on Sunday, just before we left Bouzincourt. He was very well, but very silent.

I am so sorry I did not acknowledge the receipt of Mother's fur skin. It is now on my great coat and keeps my ears beautifully warm. I took care not to have the skin cut.

The hand warmer is excellent, especially for thawing my boots in the early morning.

It is no good you sending me out long boots, because I can indent for them here, and I shall take good care to get a big enough pair this time.

I am too tired to write any more now.

Yours till hell freezes.

*R.J.N.N.*

*January 29th,* 1917. *Ovillers Huts.*

We are having bitter weather with an average of 15 degrees of frost per day, and every day the whole Regiment supplies working parties. This morning our job was to salve any overturned trucks we found on the line. Those that we did find, were frozen into the ground, and it was an awful task to put them on the line again. However, we managed to salve 12 of them and push them back to the main dump. We picked up no end of war material and saw much more that we could not move owing to the frost. The waste out here is simply colossal. These trucks come off the rail every 100 yards; wherever, in fact, there is a joint, and it is hell putting them back as they are not at all light. Two men and I pulled one from the forward dump back to the main dump close by here. It was hard work up the slope, but on the other side we all three mounted the truck and free-wheeled for about three-quarters of a mile until we were shot off the blamed thing on coming to some points. They never stay on the rails over points by any chance!

The longer I am with this Regiment, the more I love it. I've got a sort of feeling that I never want to be parted from it. I never felt like that with the 3rd Battalion, but out here we are all such good friends. Brothers we are and brothers we will remain. You can't really know anyone until you come out here.



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It's very cold in the morning, as you can imagine. Our boots get frozen stiff, and sponges are hard enough to play football with. The water in our canvas buckets freezes to an inch of ice every night and getting up—well, it is bloodstained!

The Gunners blow holes in the Ancre to make water-holes for horses.

*M.K.N.*

30.1.17. *Bruce Huts, Ovillers.*

I got your letter on returning from an all-day working party in the line, or rather just behind the line. Now that there is more doing, you will have to share my letters, as time does not always allow of my writing three. I received to-day two compasses from Dad. Please thank him very much for them. A compass is most important in this part of the line. Also J.C.F. sent me a beautiful fur head-comforter, and a pair of waterproof knee caps. The former is simply ideal for this weather.

To-night, I am going on another working party up the line, starting from here at 5.30 p.m. I expect we shall get back in the small hours of the morning, if we are lucky. It is now snowing, and we are in for the hell of a time, I fear.

Our work consists in pushing trolleys or trucks along a light railway, loaded with revetting material. The ground is frozen as hard as iron, and the snow on the surface has been trodden into ice and walking is most damnably hard. Needless to say, the railway line is shelled at odd intervals to make the night more exciting. Pushing these damned trucks is hard and exhausting work, and the men loathe anything in the nature of a fatigue. But this stuff has got to get up to the forward dump for the men in the front line; poor devils, I do pity them in this weather.

However, as it is dry, gum boots need not be worn.

I am writing this in one of the draughtiest huts that was ever constructed. The fire won't burn in the stove, even if there was an allowance of fuel, which there is not! When anything is put on it, it smokes the hut out, so that it is almost better to remain cold than be asphyxiated and have to wear gas respirators!

*B.H.A.N.*

*February 2nd,* 1917. *Ovillers-la-Boiselle.*

We are not in the trenches yet. We occupy very draughty huts behind the line, and still supply working parties every day to push material to the forward dump, known as



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" C " Dump. It's a rotten game and very hard work. I was out last night from 6 p.m. to 3.15 a.m. Each truck was stacked with 40 duckboards and pushed by six men. The ground over which the bloodstained light railway runs is undulating and these heavy duckboards took a lot of pushing to get up the incline. Then about every 200 yards the damned trucks came off the line and the duckboards were shot off like a pack of cards. That meant re-stacking them all over again ; and this sort of thing happened all through the night. The men swore and blasphemed and so did I. We were all dead beat when we got in. However, the Hun did not strafe us as he usually does at " C " Dump, which is only just behind the crest on which our front line is situated.

The weather is colder than any I have ever experienced before. Our sponges and boots are frozen stiff every morning. The beer and Perrier are solid at meals, and the condensed milk just like an ice cream. I always go up the line with a fleece under my British warm, a Balaclava helmet pulled down right over my ears and wrapped round at the bottom with a camel's hair scarf. Then I turn the collar of my coat over my tin helmet and thus hope to keep warm. Sometimes, in the middle of the night it is so cold that a dew drop on the end of my nose freezes into an icicle !

There is now a topping bombardment going on ; our heavies sending shells on their missions of mercy. My hat ! they are heavies too !

*R.J.N.N.*

*February 4th,* 1917. *Ovillers Huts.*

It was very nice to get your letter written on the anniversary of the day of my gazette. I wondered if you would remember it. In that way your memory is very fresh ; you never forget the date of things that have happened in the family. Thus has passed my first year in this wonderful Regiment. I do so sincerely hope that I shall be able to serve with it for many years to come. You don't know how I love it all, and soldiering as a whole agrees with me, the open air part of it especially, and I think I am getting harder. However, these working parties take it out of me a good bit as we generally get back in the early hours of the morning.

I have to thank you very much indeed for the two compasses, and also for the 1,000 cigarettes which were distributed among the men yesterday. The compass restores my confidence again; I should not like to go up to the trenches without one.

*The Times* Literary Supplement has come too, for which many thanks. I have just finished reading *Hamlet* and



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am now going to read *Richard III.* I got your hank of whipcord which has already proved its use. It ought to form part of every soldier's equipment.

*R.J.N.N.*

*February 4th,* 1917. *Ovillers Huts.*

I wrote a letter to you at lunch-time and posted it, and then the mail brought me another from you in a Broadsheet envelope. I am sorry if my letters of late have not been full enough. Sometimes our letters cross. As you can well imagine, it is pretty chilly out here nowadays, and everything freezes except spirits like brandy and whisky.

I received three parcels to-day; one containing Devonshire cream, which was frozen hard, the second, great delicacies of plums, peppermints, ginger, and chocolate, which I shall keep as an emergency ration. The Devonshire cream came at exactly the right moment. The pudding for lunch was tinned strawberries served up hot! I opened the cream and the heat thawed it and made the whole into a strawberry mess which was perfectly delicious!!

You ask me about the future; well, what do I know about it? I am not at liberty to tell you yet. We shall soon be going up into the line again, I suppose, but when exactly, I don't know.

I have been definitely taken off the engineering job and another new officer, Straith, put on in my place.

It is good to hear of optimism from home, as generally it is the other way about, and we are told that we know nothing worth listening to. But if people at home are optimistic there must be some cause for it. I hope the Navy will be able to get in a real knock. I think if all goes as well as it should here, the Germans will have to try their luck with our Navy before this month is out and the spring offensive starts. I wonder what you think of this new move on the part of the Hun, viz. the destruction of all ships at sight. It's going to be pretty awful if they start on hospital ships. I see that we are going to make reprisals, and I wonder what shape they will take. I hope we shall pop it across them very severely. I suppose the crux of the whole thing is our supply of food, and the Hun thinks he can starve us out by torpedoing everything.

*M.K.N.*

*Feb. 4th,* 1917. *Ovillers-la-Boiselle.*

I hope you are making the best of this frost to get some skating. It is a pity you are not at Sloley, for Westwick lake would make a glorious skating rink.



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Our job, now, consists in these working parties up to the line. I get every other night in bed. It is abominably cold, and the moon makes night as clear as day. I go out generally at about 5.30 p.m. and get back at about 3.30 a.m. We push these blamed trucks along a light railway. There is a most officious officer in charge whom I fight every time we meet. His is a job that I think J.C.F. had when he was out here. However, I think I have told you all this in my other letters.

Last night, I came in quite early at 10 p.m. because our guns were going to strafe the Hun. At 11 p.m. they started and, by Jove, the noise was simply amazing. This place is simply teeming with guns of every calibre, and to hear them all go off together, at the same moment, was thrilling.

I believe we are going once more into the line, and then perhaps, the whole Division is coming out to prepare——. But all this is vague, and I know nothing of the future happenings.

I shall soon be due for leave. As far as I can see, my turn should come round about the 27th of this month. But leave is sure to close before that.

*R.J.N.N.*

*February 15th*, 1917. *Fricourt.*

This is the first opportunity I have had to write home for a long while. There have been a great many things going on on our front as you will have seen from the papers.

We had a very exciting tour in the line this time, too exciting in fact to be pleasant. We went up on the night of the 11th. We had a quite good journey up to the front line as there was a fairly bright moon. This time "B" was one of the reserve companies for the first two days.

The first night in the front line posts was quite quiet, and Giles and I managed to keep warm stamping about in the trench. The former has taken over command of "B" as Harry Spurge has gone off to-day to Hospital to have an operation for rupture which he contracted coming down from the line last time when he fell into a shell-hole.

It was thrilling to watch our guns cutting wire on the first day, the morning of the 12th. Our gunners were sending over some big stuff and shooting with good success. At dusk they all stopped. Then, at 7 p.m., Chevallier, the Regimental Lewis Gun Officer accompanied by the Brigade Intelligence Officer, came and warned us that we might be raided that night by the Hun. This information had been gleaned from a Hun prisoner captured a few days before. Shoveller, as we call Chevallier, talked so loud that I thought the Kaiser in Berlin would probably hear what he knew, and as the posts



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are very close to the Boche, it seemed that he wanted them to hear as well. Having delivered their messages, they buzzed off back to Headquarters, and left Giles and me with the wind vertical! There was every possibility of the raid being made against us as our Headquarter post was slightly forward and flanked by a sunken road.

We prepared, immediately, for the worst, and got out bombs and all manner of ammunition. The suspense of waiting was awful, and the time seemed to drag interminably. At 7.45 Giles decided to visit the other posts, and I was left in charge of Company Headquarters. Giles had not been gone a quarter of an hour when the Boches opened a barrage on our left where the H.L.I. held the line. The night was black as pitch, and very foggy, so that we could only see twenty yards in front of our parapet. We manned the trench and placed the Lewis gun in a coign of vantage.

Of course, as soon as the barrage started we knew that some raiders were coming over. A few seconds later, we saw the H.L.I. send up the S.O.S. rocket to tell our gunners to open fire. I must say I was relieved to see that rocket go up!

Before one rocket had flickered out, our guns opened simultaneously with a blasting barrage on the enemy's front line. It seemed that hell was let loose on the Germans. I looked over the parapet and saw our first shell burst, most beautifully timed. But the second—I saw a trail of fire go straight into the right hand corner of our trench with a fizzing noise—shrapnel!! The next thing I heard was a long-drawn out moan of agony and I knew that some poor devil had gone. Then, two more of our shells burst over the same corner, so we edged down to the left end of the post. It was while we were moving that another of our shells burst right over my head; I was knocked absolutely flat and my tin hat rolled down the trench. Luckily, there was a dug-out in our post, and I told the men to take cover while I and the Lewis gunner waited at the top and had a peep over the parapet every now and then. It seemed highly unlikely that the Boches would come our way as well, and if they had, our guns would have given them worse hell than they were actually giving us at the moment.

On the other side of the trench was the little shelter that Giles and I occupied. I heard the shrapnel ripping it up, and the bits rattling like peas. As the shelling got hotter, I thought I had better do something about it, so I sent through a message in clear on the power buzzer to say that our guns were firing short. I thought the barrage had been blasting us for an hour, but when I looked at my watch I was dumbfounded to see that it was only 8.15!

All through the bombardment I was as cool as a



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cucumber. I was quite surprised at myself, but then, we had had no time to think about anything, and I felt frightfully excited and wished I had a rifle instead of an automatic.

Just as I had sent off this message, an officer descended the dug-out sweating from every pore. I have never seen anyone in such a malt. He had been caught in our barrage as well as the Boche. He said that our guns were dropping shells from two to three hundred yards behind our front line, and he had crawled the whole way from shell-hole to shell-hole until he struck our post.

Next, I got a message to say that gas was being let off on our right. I took this to mean that the Boche was doing the letting off, because the wind was in the right direction for this; as it happened we were letting if off far away on our right beyond the salient where the wind was right for us. That message did not help matters!

The bombardment ended at 9 p.m., and we all got up into the trench where I found Giles, whom I never expected to see again. As a matter of fact the post he had stopped in was not touched by any of the shelling.

We found that two men had been killed in the right corner of the trench, and they were our two servants. My servant was a gem. It was his first time in the line too. We also found that a dud shell had fallen just where I had been squatting, and I think I had a narrow escape.

The Colonel came up soon afterwards and cheered us up a lot. Chevallier had told us before the raid that he had been given the Legion of Honour, and when we congratulated him, he laughingly remarked: "Isn't it awful to think that I shall be a French Shoveller for the rest of my days!" He sent up four stretcher-bearers and our two servants were taken down and buried. That was the first time that I had seen a man killed.

We were all pretty glad to get out of the trenches and to reach huts at 1 a.m. on the 14th. The raid was easily repulsed; only about 12 got into our line of whom six were taken prisoners. The others managed to snaffle a Lewis gun team which had been pushed forward into No Man's Land on the express orders of the Brigadier. The raid started 70 strong and the enemy lost about 30 all told. So, it was a failure from their point of view.

That is all my news.

*B.H.A.N.*

*February 16th,* 1917. *Fricourt.*

I was rather unlucky up in the line this time, for my servant was killed. He used to look after me like a father. I



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never had to ask him to do anything; it was always done before I needed to ask. I had only had him a month and I chose him out of my platoon. He came from Slough, and used to supply m'tutor's with vegetables. He was a quiet good chap, and now he has gone.

He was killed instantly by a shell from our guns which burst in the trench not five paces from me, and yet I was not touched. Do you think there is anything I can do for Hastings' family? I feel his loss most awfully.

*M.K.N.*

18.2.17 *Fricourt.*

I wrote a long letter to Dad, narrating all my experiences in our last spell in the front line. We had a pretty thin time on the whole, and I am most awfully grieved at the loss of my servant. I was extremely lucky. But then, what are narrow shaves? Everything seems to be a narrow shave out here, when we are in the front line. An 8-inch crump bursts a 100 yards ahead of you and you always say to yourself: how d—d lucky I did not start three minutes earlier, or I should have copped it on the napper!

However, it is not nice, when you are going along a track, to see two or three crumps burst just ahead of you, because you know that you have got to get past that spot; you can't go round it for fear of losing your way, and you know that the Hun has got 8-inch howitzers trained on the track, and may plaster you at any moment. That is what tells on your nerves, I think. But as time goes on, you get used to it. And after all, if you are not wiped out during your first time in, there is really no reason why you should get hit at all, is there?

I am now quite separated from the Regiment; all by myself with a party of 50 men who work on the Railhead, unloading ammunition trains. As a matter of fact, I am having a topping rest, which was what I wanted after the "strenuosities" of the past month. I mess with the O.C. Railhead and two other officers who are here on the same job. We have got a very comfy mess with an open fire, which is quite reminiscent of home. There is also plenty of fuel, which we never have in the Regiment. There, our fuel depends on what we can steal!

So, I am quite happy, though it is horrid to be parted from the Regiment. Anyway, it is infinitely better than that damned front line, which is most unhealthy.

I am afraid all your skating is over, now that the thaw has set in. For my part I can't say that I am sorry that the weather has changed. It is such a relief to be warm again,



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that I can almost tolerate the mud which is fast appearing on all sides. However. I suppose, with the thaw we must expect rain and mud and then, probably, we shall long for a hard frost and it will be denied us.

However, it is nice to be able to sleep in pyjamas at night. During the hard frost no one dared to take off his pants except to change. It may sound unhealthy, but it was far too cold to wear only pyjamas, and we used to dress to go to bed, in cardigans, mufflers and Balaclava helmets. I would rather be warm and dirty than frozen and clean! It was hell trying to force my feet into my boots which were frozen stiff every morning. My servant used to stuff them with paper and set it alight, and the heat made them sufficiently pliable for me to get my feet into them.

We have not been dragged into this show: therefore no cause for alarm. What is going to happen to the Gov'nor? Is he going to be called up under the age of 61?

*R.J.N.N.*

*March, 4th,* 1917. *Albert.*

This is the first opportunity I have had to write for the last eight days. Toby's cigarettes arrived on the fourth day in the line when we had all run out and were a perfect god-send. Tell him that "A," "B" and "D" Companies are greatly indebted to him for them.

As so many things have happened during the last week, I propose to recount them in diary form which is the easiest.

*February 23rd.*

Paraded at 5.30 p.m. for the line, an eight mile march. Picked up gum boots at the store at 7.15 and water in petrol tins at the junction of Artillery Lane. We then carried on by platoons to the cross roads where we met the guide from the 1st King's Liverpools. Then took the duckboard track on which I experienced the worst journey since I've been out here. Men were falling into shell-holes up to their armpits in wet mud, from which it was a labour of Hercules to extract them, and caused much delay. Marched down the valley and up over the crest through a trench. Then the Huns started shelling the track to make confusion worse confounded. Mud was indescribable. I arrived at No. 9 Post with my servant, Platoon Serjeant and four men out of the whole of the platoon. the remainder being bogged at "B" Dump. I relieved and took over from a King's officer who was nearly off his head from being alone for six days under a piece of corrugated iron with bully beef and biscuits for grub. I assumed command at 12 midnight.



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*February 24th.*

Stragglers came in in driblets all night up to "stand-to" at 5.30 a.m. Some of them had been badly stuck in the mud. Went over with Giles to Company Headquarters in No. 8 Post. No signs of Germans in opposite trench. Also we noticed that the enemy's Verey lights were going up a long way behind their front line. I remarked on this fact to Giles and suggested that the Boche had evacuated his front line.

Had breakfast in the dug-out and then tried to sleep. Went back to No. 9 Post at 7 p.m. to do my night duty with my platoon. A patrol went out to see if the Hun front line was still occupied.

*February 25th.*

The night seemed interminable. I did not dare try to sleep because I might miss a visit to the sentries in the little posts. I sat up in between-whiles in the funny little shanty carving names of places I've been to over here, on my ashplant stick.

Went over to Company Headquarters at 5.15 a.m. to find the whole place astir. News had come through that the enemy was retiring and a patrol went out to verify it. Everyone was very excited, thinking "Here is a bit of open warfare at last." A Gunner Major turned up and went forward to lay a telephone wire. At 7.30 a.m. the H.L.I. arrived in force and went forward in pursuit and to make touch with the Boche. The Gunner returned with the news that we could occupy the enemy second line. Huge excitement! Next, the Serjeant in charge of the patrol returned and reported that he had been fired on by about twenty Germans when moving forward. The Gunner rather mistrusted this information and went forward again along his wire, accompanied by a patrol of six men of the H.L.I., and was never seen again. Presumably he was captured because the coil was found later and beside it, six rifles.

In the afternoon, I had orders to get into touch with the Fusiliers who were in the second enemy line. Eagle and I started off in daylight at 5.30 p.m. under direct observation from the enemy on the ridge behind the village of Pys. We got through the wire and were going along the Pys road, when the Hun, who had obviously spotted us advancing, put down an awful barrage on the road. We left the road which was too unhealthy, and got into a shell-hole and waited for the atmosphere to clear a bit; but we had to wait about an hour before the shelling diminished sufficiently to allow us to advance. Gradually the shelling grew less and we went forward to try and find this trench which no one had seen before. By this time it was pitch dark. I took two platoons forward, and we got



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absolutely lost, so I thought it would be best to try and strike the road and adjust my bearings. By means of my compass I found the old German front line which we followed till we found the Pys road. Thus, I was back almost where I had started from!

However, on the road I found a messenger who said that we had got to go back to our old posts. Had no casualties, which was a miracle considering the amount of muck flying about. Dead beat and slept in Company Headquarters.

*February 26th.*

Relief arrived at 3.30 a.m. Giles and I went down to the dug-outs in Courcelette arriving at 6.30 a.m. A lovely sunny morning and consequently the mud has started to dry up. At last it was safe to walk about among the ruins in daylight. Our aeroplanes very active over the new front line. Watched our guns shelling Loupart Wood, which has been a thorn in our side for so long as it overlooked our line and back areas.

I slept on the bottom step of a dug-out and nearly froze to death.

*February 27th.*

Another lovely day. Someone found some new Boche dug-outs in the village and Giles and I searched for souvenirs therein.

Paraded at 8.30 p.m. for the new front line. The going was infinitely easier after two days of drying sun. We reached our old Headquarters in No. 8 Post in splendid time; from there we turned right along the old front line to No. 3 A Post where we picked up guides from the 74th, across No Man's Land, through the Boche first and second lines till we reached Regimental Headquarters in Aqueduct Road. Luckily the Huns kept fairly quiet and we had a rest outside the dug-outs. The last part of the journey was the stickiest, for we had to cross a ridge, which, by day, was under direct observation by the enemy. We could hear the snipers firing and my guide told me that they had a rifle "laid" on the track to and from the front. We wasted no time, crossing the crest by platoons, and then descended into the valley, crossed a stream, and so reached the communication trench. The Boche knew all about the little bridge over the stream because rifle shots cracked like a whip lash at odd intervals, and put the fear of God into me! This was the first continuous piece of trench system I had been in, and the Company Headquarters were established in a dug-out with about five steps. The 74th were not sorry to quit.



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*February 28th.*

The enemy started pasting the crossing of the stream on our left at 3 a.m. At noon they were still at it. Giles and I went over to "A" Company on the right. The trench had been badly smashed in and we kept very low. We were occupying Gallwitz Switch, immediately under the crest on which Loupart Wood stands, and anyone in the trench in front of the wood could have easily spotted us darting along our trench. As we were leaving "A" Company, the enemy started shelling more furiously than ever, and two "woolly bears" (5.9 shrapnel) burst just behind us, so we returned to "A's" dug-out until the shelling slackened a bit. When once we started for our own line we scuttled like rabbits, I can tell you!

The bombardment still continued. It was awful, and, moreover, the Hun gunners were able to enfilade our bit of trench and they did so with excellent effect. Shrapnel bullets were falling all round us. I had one man killed in my platoon, concussed to death by H.E. and rather a nasty sight. I thought the bombardment was never going to end, and we were all a bit shaken after over twelve hours of it. It was really absolute hell. The two platoons on the left near the stream had the worst of it, and had one man killed, two wounded, and a Serjeant shell-shocked. All this time our guns had been silent until at 4 p.m., to our intense relief, we heard the twanging bark of our 18-pounders as they opened on the enemy front line. It was glorious to think that the Boche was having some of what he had given us. Our guns continued for an hour or so and at 6 p.m. the enemy stopped bombarding, and by that time we had had our bellyful.

*March 1st.*

I woke up at 12.30 a.m. and heard machine guns firing and also our men firing "rapid" away on the left. A second later the Huns opened a barrage. Giles was on duty, and "Fritz" Eagle and I in the dug-out. A machine gunner popped his head down our shaft and said: "They are coming over." We were up those steps like rats, but in the shemozzle "Fritz" pinched my automatic by mistake, and I did not know where his was!

As I got to the top step two shells burst just over my head in an orange glare that lit up the inky darkness. Star shells were sailing up into the air all round; in fact the Germans had got the wind up badly and must have thought that we were coming over! By the light of each one of their star shells I peered into the night, but devil the sign of a moving thing could I see. From our side not a single Verey light was fired, so



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whoever thought that the Boche was coming must have been seeing things!

But the chap who said they were coming over put the wind up me properly, and I was almost in a panic when I couldn't find my automatic. I had visions of being unable to defend myself.

At 4 a.m. I led my platoon back, because our guns were going to cut wire in front of Loupart Wood. It was a lovely afternoon and a great relief to get out of the shell fire. Occupied old German dug-outs in the Miramont Road.

*March 2nd.*

Spent the day burying Canadians killed five months ago. Some were a horrible sight. Scrounged for souvenirs, but there was nothing worth having.

*March 3rd.*

A lovely spring day. Our guns came up. More burying. The dead were a detestable sight. Thank God, their dear ones can't see them like this. Relieved at 8.30 p.m. by the 1st 60th Rifles and reached Albert at midnight where we have very good billets. The men marched splendidly in the moonlight.

This is the end of my diary of the eight days in the line. The parcels which arrived in the interval were most welcome.

*M.K.N.*

*March 4th,* 1917 *Albert.*

I have been in the line for the last eight days. I had not had a wash for eight days until this morning. We have been following up the Hun and, for two days we were shelled all day and all night in Gallwitz Switch, which was perfectly frightful. We got in late last night to these huts, and I am going to try and forget this last week before I write a long letter. Please tell Angela that I am badly in need of socks.

*R.J.N.N.*

*March 8th,* 1917. *Albert.*

I have very little news for you. We are having great fun here. A chap called Horley re-joined on the 5th, whose brother was at Norfolk House with me, and is now in the Navy, He is a great lad, full of " quips and cranks and wanton wiles " as Milton has it. One of his tricks is to crawl under the table and light the bottom of the newsaper when Shoveller is reading it!



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Yesterday we played a trick on the Doctor, McTurk, who was standing in front of the fire holding forth at great length. "Shiny" Horley got hold of a Verey light cartridge which we cut open outside the mess. We then extracted the magnesium and powder, and I put the empty cartridge in my pocket. Unaware of a plot, the Doctor was still gassing when we returned. "Shiny" took cover behind the folding doors which divide the long mess room and which were half open, while I walked up to the fire which was practically out and, quite nonchalantly, dropped the cartridge into it and made for safety behind the doors!

There was a loud explosion and clouds of embers and the grate were blown into the room and McTurk was enveloped in dust. For a second he was almost invisible. Then, roaring like a bull and spitting fury, he took up a book and hurled it at me just before I could reach cover. It was a good shot and caught me on the left ear with the point of the cover!

Meanwhile, "Shiny's" face was just visible round the corner of the folding doors, wreathed in smiles. It was damned funny to see the Doctor. He took it jolly well, and it also had the desired effect of stopping him gassing! But though "Shiny" was the instigator and I merely the perpetrator, the Doctor went for me and left "Shiny" alone, and the latter did not even come to my help in the ensuing rough house!

I had no idea there was such force in the ordinary cap of a Verey light. The grate was not irreparably damaged. It was already broken before we blew it out, and it functioned all right afterwards.

*M.K.N.* *Bruce Huts,*

*March 12th, 1917* *Ovillers-la-Boiselle.*

Yesterday we left our abode of rest at Albert, and marched up to these well-known huts. This is the last opportunity that I shall have of writing to you for a long time, so that you can guess what we are going to do. If it is all successful and I come through unscathed, I hope I shall soon come home on leave. The suspense and anticipation is the worst of it. I am sure that, when once we are on the move it won't be so bad, and we shall be seeing red.

Well, au revoir; I hope I shan't be a coward. It will be over by the time you get this. I will write as soon as I can, after we are relieved.

(The 52nd was warned to do an attack on Loupart Wood on the 15th of March. The enemy actually retired on the eve of the battle).



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*R.J.N.N.*

*March 12th,* 1917. *Ovillers Huts.*

I have mislaid your last two letters. These continual moves are the cause of most losses. We came here yesterday from Albert. We paraded in the evening and found it very warm marching. It was such a lovely evening, so peaceful and beautiful that it almost seemed a crime to even think of war at such a time. And yet in a few days time it looks as if there will be great things coming to pass. Great things for us, but such as you can read in the papers every day.

On March 9th I went to Amiens with Dick Warren. I had been there once before for the day only. This time we were allowed 24 hours leave. We went into the Cathedral, which is very beautiful. A great many of the statues and the gateway are completely surrounded with sandbags. Inside, as is usual in Catholic Churches, you can't see the architecture for tawdry modern decorations which cover the walls and pillars and sear the eye. The pulpit is what m'tutor would call "an atrocity," gilt and supported by caryatides which, more even than usual, look as if they had horrible backaches. Some of the glass is very fine and there are a few very good frescoes.

It was a great relief to be in a town where there are more than two houses standing next to each other. Dick and I did much shopping for the Regiment, and started back on the 10th and had to walk half the way, because none of the Staff cars, which whizzed past us, would condescend to give us a lift.

I hope that I shall get my leave when the Division is relieved. Griffith-Williams is going to-day. The allotment, at present, is only two of all ranks from the Brigade on Mondays and Fridays. As the roster stands, there is only one officer to go before me, so that I hope I shall get mine before April. Though I have no grouse, I think the way leave is worked is very unfair. The Staff, A.S.C. and A.O.C. get their leave every three months with the greatest regularity, and they do comparatively nothing contrasted with the wretched infantry. The less you do, the more pay and leave you get!

*B.H.A.N.*

*March 14th,* 1917. *Cromwell Huts, Ovillers,*

Great things have been happening on our front as you will see by the papers. The Hun can run very fast when he likes, and the Regiment was called up yesterday to support the advance, and probably we shall go up ourselves and chase him. His retirement has prevented a lot of trouble, because, if he had not retreated, we should have had to push him from



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his position. The original plan was that Ellis and I of "B" Company should be left out as a reserve in case of casualties among the officers, so I came back here to the transport. In some ways I was lucky, yet on the other hand it's rather horrid having to leave your platoon to do the dirty work. The Regiment is bivouacked in the "Lady's Leg," so called because of it's shape on the map.

The weather is turning very stormy, and rain is now pouring down, creating oceans of mud, liquid and soggy.

We had a glorious eight days rest after coming out of the line last time. It was a well-deserved rest after eight days "in." We were billeted in Albert, and went to the Australian Divisional show practically every night. They sang one excellent parody of "My Old Kentucky Home." This is it:—

One night Fritz on patrol
Crawled into a shell hole,
"There's something haunting me,
I've got some fears," said he.
Tommy upon his trail
Made Fritz turn quite pale,
Didn't know what to do
Till Tommy a Mills bomb threw.
Then he had a sneaky sort of feeling round his heart
That he wants to burrow down.
One bit of Mills hit him on his Beecham's pills,
And another bit a little lower down.
One tore off his haversack,
The next one lowered his Union Jack,
He tried to burrow lower,
But the Mills bomb thrower
An—oth—er bomb threw.
So poor old Fritz has gone
Where he'll never, never roam,
For the last bit of bomb landed right upon
His old Kentucky Home.

Rather good, don't you think?

When we were in rest I rode over to see Jasper who was out up the line. However, he came over and had tea with the Regiment two days later. He was very full of our new advance; he, of course, knew more about it than we, as he is on Corps Staff.

Our news is very limited these days; partly because of the rest in billets, and partly because the most interesting news cannot be disclosed. Nevertheless, the war is not going to last much longer. We heard a wild rumour yesterday that Turkey had thrown up the sponge, and that Austria was treating for an armistice. There might be some probability in the former.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*March 17th, 1917.* *Courcelette Dug-outs.*

The Hun is now miles away from this place in which it was unsafe at one time to show yourself in daylight. Cavalry are out and Bapaume is in flames. It has fallen at last, but the Boche are burning it wholesale.

"Bingo" Baines went up to see the place this afternoon, and I am going to-morrow to see what there is to be seen, which I don't suppose will amount to much, even if it has ceased to burn.

The Germans have made a very careful and systematic retirement and have destroyed many dug-outs. The great danger at the moment lies in their preconceived traps to catch the unwary. Souvenirs of an attractive character have been found to be attached to explosives, such as artificial flowers, evergreens, even nose caps and bits of dud shells, while in the dug-outs it is hardly safe to put weight on the middle of a step, and anything sticking out of the wall, such as a bayonet, has to be regarded with the gravest suspicion. They have mined the steps and handrails in some cases.

The Regiment has been employed in making roads, and very interesting work it has proved to be; partly, because the progress of the repairs can so easily be seen by all ranks. As work goes, the men seem to like it.

It has been a real warm spring day to-day, and I felt it was a joy to be alive and kicking. It was unnecessary to find something to look forward to; ordinarily, I always have something to hope for, and it is generally the mail which seldom disappoints me, whereas to-day was sufficient in itself to satisfy the worst grouser. The men, too, seemed to be cheerier and more willing to work.

We have just received the news of the Russian Revolution. It has made a great difference to the cheeriness of us all, down in this blasted dug-out.

There were a good many air fights to-day, as it was ideal for observation. I saw two of our planes brought down. I think we are losing, if indeed we have ever gained, the supremacy of the air on this front.

*R.J.N.N.* *Bruce Huts,*

*March 23rd, 1917.* *Ovillers.*

When I last wrote we were road making at Warlencourt, for which we were congratulated by Brigade. On the 18th the Regiment moved up to Grévillers, and I went to see the trenches which we were going to attack on the 15th, if the enemy had not retired. They were in front of Loupart Wood,



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and were a very awkward objective. I am very glad the Regiment did not have to try and take them. On the 19th the Regiment was recalled from digging trenches behind a very strong line of wire in front of Bihucourt. As the Germans were shortening their line, it followed that we were too, and the 2nd Division was squeezed out altogether. The 18th Division on our left was holding the line on a platoon frontage!! The result of this Boche retirement is that we have got a whole Army Corps to spare, but so has the enemy!

The country in front of us is perfect; lovely fertile fields without a sign of a shell hole which is such a change from the awful desolation of the old front. But it is said that the enemy have poisoned all the wells in the villages which they have burnt in their wake. The men are fearfully bucked at this advance. For once, they can see the results of their labours spread over nine months in this ruddy sector. We are off to-morrow. This time we go northwards to hold the line until such time as we are told to attack.

Here is a story of this advance:—When the 6th Brigade advanced in pursuit of the enemy, they came across three Germans in Loupart Wood. They had been left behind with three days' rations. Two of them had very bad trench feet, the other had only one leg, and he had orders to fire Verey lights at night to make us think that the line was still held in force, and also to fire his machine gun intermittently. They were, in fact, left to be sacrificed because they could not march! When they gave themselves up, they told our men where all the traps had been laid and any information that we wanted. There is an example of culture. To me it seems past belief that any one could be so inhuman as to leave three poor wretches to live or die as best they might.

The cavalry are out in front now, and all old cavalrymen have had orders to rejoin their old regiments. I saw some cavalry going through Albert. They looked ripping. At the present moment there is a Cavalry Brigade bivouacking behind these huts. I met Tom Hilder who went to Eton the same half as I. He is in the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons. He and a brother officer came to dinner with me. There are also some Bengal Lancers, for whom I feel very sorry because they look so supremely miserable in this weather.

This sort of life keeps me fit, if it does nothing else. I am always having letters from home telling of heavy colds, while here none of us ever feel ill, and I am sure the weather is not any less inclement here than in England. I really think I have chosen the right profession. I love an open air life, and although we have rotten times, these are all compensated for by the marvellous fun we have out of the line. That is due to the Regiment and I am sure that many are not nearly so lucky as I.



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And if I can survive this war, I am absolutely free of myself and all men.

*M.K.N.* *Bruce Huts,*

*March 23rd,* 1917. *Ovillers-la-Boiselle.*

I got a letter from you to-day and also a parcel containing those lovely socks, which are a perfect boon.

It is very sad to think that you are leaving home. Will you be able to get off when I come on leave? I received your rather sad letter telling me of your intention to go on the land, when we were in the line and it made me miserable at first. I quite see your point of view, and I do admire your patriotism.

The 52nd, in fact the whole of the Division, is out of the line now, and we start north to-morrow. I hope we shall run into the 5th Battalion at Arras.

By the way, one of our officers saw Robert Foster the other day. As we are leaving this part of the line I suppose I shall not see him now.

We have been having a topping time these last two days, except for the change in the weather. Practically every night we have been to the Australian Divisional Theatre in Albert, and I have never enjoyed a show more in my life. The players were really funny, and some of the topical songs were killing. There was a grand show there the other night when General Birdwood, who commands the Australians, paid a visit. They were all especially funny.

I hope you will enjoy yourself on the land.

*B.H.A.N.*

*April 1st,* 1917. *Floringhem.*

I think it is time that I thought of your birthday, and so I am writing to wish you many happy returns of the day. I am going to try and find something nice for you in one of the towns round here. Would you like a 5.9 howitzer, because the shell when it comes makes a most enchanting noise!

We are opposite a new part of the line up here. The Hun for one thing is not on the move and, I am told, we have proper trenches which won't be so bad. The Regiment was here last July or June.

I fear that I shall not get any leave at all unless something unforeseen occurs. So if you see me, you will have the hell of a surprise.



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*M.K.N.*

*April 1st*, 1917. *Floringhem.*

I expect you are finding the work very strenuous, and I also expect you miss your Sunday. Out here one never knows Sunday from other days, except that it is generally chosen as a suitable day on which to make a move. However. I expect you feel fitter than you ever have before, in spite of the evil odours of pigsties and manure!

The last week has been spent in marching from the Somme, whence the Hun has retired to the Hindenburg Line. We are now much further north, in the back areas behind Arras, and are billeted in a ripping little village just out of Pernes, which comes in very useful for small necessities.

I am beginning to wonder when this war is going to end; it seems endless, doesn't it? Never mind, I am wedded to the one and only 52nd.

*R.J.N.N.*

*April 1st*, 1917. *Floringhem.*

I fear you will be thinking me very neglectful for not having written for so long. My only excuse is that we have been on the move for the last week, and now we have reached our destination in the mining country.

I enjoyed the march very much, and the weather was kind to us except for one day. The men marched extraordinarily well, and in "B" there was only one man who fell out during the whole six days of marching. On the 24th we marched to Hérissart where we stayed a day. From there we marched to Gézaincourt on the 26th, Ligny-sur-Canche on the 27th, and so to Héricourt on the 28th, where we stayed a day. On the last day we passed through a village where the Tank Brigade has its Headquarters. I saw one manoeuvring. It was most interesting to see it trundling along like a gigantic reptile. It crossed the road and climbed the bank on the other side as if there had been no incline at all.

*R.J.N.N.*

*April 3rd*, 1917. *Floringhem.*

Four months ago to-day I was at home with the prospect of coming out here in two days. In some ways it seems ages ago since I left, yet in others it might be yesterday. Time flies like the wings of the wind, partly because we have such a jolly good time when we are out of the line.

There seems to have been a rumour, prevalent in England lately, of an invasion. Everyone in the mess has been re-



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ceiving letters full of thrilling stories of a landing in Scotland which, apparently, are all devoid of truth.

Giant slagheaps adorn the skyline for miles round here. They are very weird looking things, and I have never seen anything like them in England.

Last night, we had rather a severe snowstorm which has blocked up a good many of the men's billets. But we are having great fun with it, and, I may say, a good many windows get broken very suddenly! "Bingo" Baines married me to "Slatcher" Whitehead wearing an antimacassar on his head, while the rest made ribald remarks about this touching scene.

*B.H.A.N.*

*April, 5th,* 1917. *Floringhem.*

To-morrow is your birthday and Good Friday. How I hope you will have a happy day, full of memories of Malvern, Beaconsfield and Sloley. How the time has slipped by and brought your birthday round again.

I have nothing to send you, but I will try and find something from the bloodstained battlefield.

To-day we walked a very long way to do a very short scheme; and what with the heaviness of the roads and the heat of the sun, we were all rather tired at the end. But it was delightful to see the sun again. We were marching up hill all the time going there, and we were sweating like pigs when we halted before the scheme began.

I heard from Jane yesterday. She seems to enjoy the land work on the whole.

*R.J.N.N.*

*April 10th,* 1917. *Robecq.*

I have very little news, and I am very sick at being parted from the 52nd. An officer was left behind from each company as a reinforcement in the event of casualties, and I represent "B." I don't know what the beloved 52nd is doing now, while I sit in this warm billet and write to you. As far as I could gather, the 52nd was to be in Corps reserve and go right through. I can only wish them all good luck. I may, of course, be called up unexpectedly, and I thoroughly hope that I am.

The Boche is getting an awful hotting as you will see by the papers; 5,000 men captured is the hell of a lot, isn't it? At last the end of the war is in sight. The Boche has got no stomach for the fight now.

I paid the 5th Battalion a visit on Good Friday. Philip Booth and I did the journey to Arras and back in the day by



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lorry-hopping. Arras must have been very fine before the war, though, considering all things, it has not been very badly knocked about; not nearly so badly as Albert, for instance. We left at 5.45 p.m., and reached our billets at 10.15, having stopped for dinner at St. Pol. Not bad going.

*B.H.A.N.*

*April 11th*, 1917. *Robecq.*

What thinkest thou of the tidings this day? As far as I can judge, we shall soon be filling in old trenches and practising shooting on the range instead of on the Boche. But still, I suppose, we must not be too optimistic. The only sickening part about all this is that I am separated from the 52nd. There are four other officers, Chippindale, Cope, Booth and Foreshew, and about 30 men, specialists in bombing and Lewis guns.

When we are wanted, we shall be sent for by the Regiment. We are billeted in a very nice little village not far north of Béthune. There are officers and men representing every regiment in the Corps, so you can imagine what a heterogeneous lot we are. At present we are messing with the 74th (i.e., the 2nd H.L.I.), who are a very silent crowd.

Booth told me a priceless thing that he saw on parade the other afternoon. Old "Daddy" Foreshew was lecturing some reinforcements on gas respirators and gas drill. He explained to them how their lives might depend on the efficiency of their respirators, adding:—"I know that the satchel looks a useful receptacle for any odds and ends that you want handy and can't stuff into your haversack, but you must on no account put anything into the satchel. It is meant for the respirator and nothing else."

"I will now give you a demonstration. Having placed the satchel in the gas alert position, so, on the command 'Gas,' you put your right hand into the satchel, grip the face mask and pull it out, so."

And then, would you believe it, as he pulled out the face-mask, a couple of candles and a pair of socks tumbled into the road in front of the troops where they could not fail to see!!

Booth was lucky, for he was behind the troops and did not have to conceal his smile!

*M.K.N.*

*April 15th*, 1917. *Robecq.*

Probably you know already, that I have been separated from the 52nd with four other officers, in order to form a



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Divisional Reception Camp (commonly known as Conception Camp). We do nothing at all here, which makes it all the worse, because the 52nd may be doing all kinds of wonderful things, and it is sickening to be left out when open warfare seems likely.

We have no official address here, but all our letters are forwarded from the 52nd. The result is that I have not heard from home for over a week now ; but that is unavoidable.

The other day, I went over to see the 5th Battalion, and saw John Vidal. Thank heaven ! I never went to that Battalion !

It was a very interesting journey, and, when we actually got to Arras, we could easily observe our shells bursting in the Boche lines. The whole town was lousy with guns. In fact there were 18-pounders and 4.5 howitzers in the squares. The noise was redoubled by the echo resounding through the shattered houses. I have never heard such an awful noise since I've been in this god-forsaken land. I went with Philip Booth (do you remember meeting him at the Savoy in September ?).

We found out, after some difficulty, where the 5th were. They were resting in the caves prior to " going over the lid." After much difficulty, we found an entrance to these caves. It proved to be an underground sewer. We walked about a mile along the side of this sewer till we reached a passage, leading off to the left, which had been hewn out of the chalk. Here we passed a policeman on the track of a Brigadier, of whom he was suspicious.

This passage was two miles long and debouched into the gigantic caves, which were lit up by electric light, and which the Spanish slaves are supposed to have excavated in the middle ages. I have never seen anything quite so prodigious as these caves ; they stretch for miles at a depth of 30 feet or more, are beautifully ventilated, and have water laid on !

*R.J.N.N.*

*April 26th,* 1917. *Bray.*

Blackwell and I left the Corps Reinforcement Camp on the 20th and marched straight down to the Regiment, which we found in support north of Arras, arriving on the 23rd. The march was rotten, because we had to forage for ourselves the whole time. There were no cookers for the men, and no mess for the officers, and the result was, that Blackwell and I had to go without dinner every night after finishing a day's march. The whole thing was carried out in true British Army style ; no one knew we were coming and nothing was arranged for us.



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and we weren't on the ration strength of the 52nd, of course, when we did turn up!

I was very pleased to get back to the Regiment, which had been having a rotten time, for a fortnight on end, in the line. The Companies had to dig in under heavy artillery fire, and many men were blown up and buried, while our guns were not in position to retaliate.

I started up for the support line at 2.30 p.m. on the 24th. On the way I watched a Hun aeroplane come over and attack one of our sausage balloons. He fired some tracer bullets which carry a little flame behind them and ignite petrol tanks of aeroplanes and balloon bags. I could see the track of the bullets quite plainly and then, the two observers jumped out in their parachutes and landed in a wood behind Arras. The Hun circled up, turned, and then potted the wretched chaps as they were floating down to the ground, until one of our machines turned up from nowhere and drove him off.

We managed to lose our way up to the support line in-spite of it being a lovely sunny afternoon. While we were wandering about trying to find the particular old Hun trench, we stopped to watch some anti-aircraft guns fire, and we had a very lucky escape; a 4.2 shell landed quite close and practically on the battery. It was as close as if you were standing on the doorstep at 25 and the shell had landed on the pillar-box at the corner. It was a dud by the grace of God! There would have been a pretty shambles if it had exploded.

Eventually I found "B" and we observed the plain between Oppy and Gavrelle through glasses and watched the Huns counter-attacking. Three times they attacked, and thrice they were scattered by our gunfire. There is an account of it in the *Daily Mail* of April 25th.

The view was simply magnificent. I could see all the mining towns, Lens on the left and Douai in the distance to our front, and the visibility was very good.

I watched a Hun aeroplane being shot up. Through my glasses I could see her wings crumple up and she came down the hell of a wallop!

The 52nd was relieved yesterday; so I was not long in the support line, but we are going up again soon, I think.

*R.J.N.N.*

*April 26th*, 1917. *Bray.*

I never thanked you for that parcel which arrived to-day. It is sweet of you to send me things like that. You can't imagine how I love to get things from home. But if food is getting scarce, please don't trouble to send me things. Keep your butter and delicacies. The papers say that there is a



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scarcity of food in England now, so please don't stint yourselves on my account. You know how I love to get parcels, but it makes me sad to think how you send me all these things when there is a shortage at home, and I wish I could repay you somehow. I received a lovely parcel from Angela with wonderful sausage rolls and other things in it. The only things that make this life bearable are the mails, and the fact that I have you to go back to. But the war is not over yet, and we must set our teeth for the final push.

The men love the cigarettes you send them, and are most grateful.

*B.H.A.N.* *Bray.*

*April 26th,* 1917 (*Near Ecoivres*).

I am back with the Regiment. Blackwell and I marched a party from Robecq, starting on the 20th. The first day we billeted in Pernes, and on the second we marched through Ourton, La Comté, Frévillers, Bethonsart to Mingoval. It was a rotten march and there were no food arrangements. On the third day, I was detailed to march the sick to Gauchin-Légal. When I got back, I found that Blackwell and the details had gone, so I hopped a lorry the whole way to Ecoivres. On the 23rd we marched off through Maroeuil, St. Aubin, and St. Nicolas to the Regimental Transport Lines just in front of the Arras-Lens road. I found the Regiment in support in the Brown Line on the top of the Vimy Ridge, and just to the right of Farbus Wood. They had had a perfectly awful time in the front line, and heavy casualties. I found that my Platoon Serjeant, Whitton, had been badly wounded.

By the time you get this you will have seen something in the papers, and you'll know who has done it. The Regiment came out of the line yesterday, and we arrived at this place at 4.30 a.m. this morning. The march was rotten, the roads being in such an awful condition. I carried a Lewis gun half the way.

The Division is in the line north of Arras, between Arleux on the left and Gavrelle on the right. From the Brown Line we could observe all the enemy's movements through glasses; in fact that was our job, to watch out for counter-attacks.

On the afternoon of the 24th there was a great deal of railway activity behind the enemy's line at Neuvireuil. We could see troops detraining, and telephoned through to our gunners to try and hurry them up a bit! The reply was that the map reference was out of range of the field guns. Eventually the heavies put a few good 'uns amongst them and they scattered like chaff. It was great fun to watch. But that was not all. About an hour later, we saw three waves of attacking



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troops advancing towards our front line at Gavrelle. We telephoned to the Field Gunners to give them hell, and were told by them, that they could not fire because the attack was being launched out of their group ! ! It was simply maddening as you can imagine. But when it seemed that the enemy were going to reach our line unmolested, there was a sudden and continuous roar of artillery on our right, and a curtain of devastating fire blotted out the advancing Huns. The next thing we saw were men, like ants, running away to the rear. The smoke rolled away, the firing ceased, the attack had been repulsed. Yet the Huns made two other efforts to reach our front line, and in each case they were caught by our guns and wiped out. I don't suppose I shall ever have another opportunity of watching an attack in complete safety. I felt quite sorry for the Huns, for they hadn't got a ghost of a chance. We could even see their officers who follow behind their men, and don't lead them. It looked as if they were driving their men.

*R.J.N.N*

*May 6th,* 1917. *Camblain-Chatelaine.*

I think I told you that I joined the Regiment on April 23rd. It was then in support on the German side of the Vimy Ridge. We moved back for two nights and returned to the Transport Lines in front of the Arras-Lens road on April 27th. Blackwell and I were left behind while the 52nd went up to the line to attack next morning, the 28th. The 52nd took all its objectives, but had to fall back because the 6th Brigade, on the right, failed to reach theirs, which however was a very hard nut to crack consisting of Oppy Wood and village. The latter were taken and retaken three times by both sides. Then the 99th Brigade relieved the 6th and made two more attempts to take these objectives. But in each case the result was the same, and the wood remained in the enemy's hands, owing to the tremendous reserves which the Hun brought up to defend the place.

The losses on both sides were heavy, and so were the 52nd's owing to the same old story—uncut wire. There were only two gaps cut by the artillery in front of the 52nd, and the whole Regiment had to go through these two. Needless to say, the Hun had machine guns covering them.

*April 28th.*

At about 9 a.m. Dowson appeared, wounded. Middle finger of left hand blown off. Soon after, " Fritz " Eagle, who had been hit in the hand. He had made for a gap where twenty Huns were " kammerading "; as soon as he tried to



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get through the wire, the Huns turned on a machine gun and threw bombs. Lyle, the "Gazeeka," wounded in stomach and backside. He has since died of wounds at Aubigny.

"Slatcher" Whitehead, "Ginger" Smith, and Walter wounded, but not seriously. Calloway killed.

*April 29th.*

A lovely morning with bright sun. Whitfeld went to the Division to get news of the fight. I was warned to go up and help. Paraded with ration party, and got up to the line without any trouble. A very quiet night. We made improvements in the trenches and dug deeper.

*April 30th.*

"Stand-to" at 4 a.m. Our guns bombarded the Huns. Oppy Wood, which had been in full leaf and thick at that, when I last saw it on the 26th, had been distinctly thinned by shell fire. The enemy opened on our front line at 4.15, and never left us alone all day. They were crumping all round our dug-out, but not actually on it, as luck would have it. There was no communication open with Headquarters, so David Barnes sent off a carrier pigeon to try and get our guns to do a bit of counter-battery work, and also to ask for stretcher parties to come and remove the wounded still lying out.

The candles in the dug-out were blown out every five minutes, and we had to "stand-to" with matches!

Barnes and Giles led out the men who had done the attack, while Blackwell and I took over command of the front line with a draft of 52nd and 74th men. Considering the intensity of the shelling, very little damage was done. This was due to the fact that our trenches were very narrow and a difficult target. Shells seemed to burst short or over, but seldom in the trench.

*May 1st.*

The enemy started shelling very early and bombarded us all day. It was perfectly awful. "Granny," way back in Roclincourt, started dropping 15-inch shells into Oppy Wood, which must have shaken Fritz up a bit. In spite of it all, we had no casualties until the evening. Great luck. Orders for our relief came at 6 p.m., and while we were preparing for it, our guns put over a "Chinese bombardment." The enemy, in retaliation, blew in our dug-out One man was buried and when extricated, found to be dead. Two orderlies were also wounded. The rest of us were untouched. A composite battalion relieved us at 11 p.m., and never have I been so glad to get back in all my life.



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A "Chinese bombardment" is a feint barrage on the enemy's front and support lines, with the result that he retaliates on our front line. As far as we, in the front line, are concerned, it does no good at all.

We are now back in the mining district. It's a lovely day and we are all very fit and well.

*M.K.N.*

*May 10th, 1917.* *Camblain-Chatelaine.*

We are now in a topping little village with very good billets. My billet is heavenly and so comfortable that I almost imagine myself at home when I wake up in the early morning. We are having a most awfully good time, like a pre-war holiday, and it is good to be alive and enjoy it all.

Bruay is just over the hill, and we make jovial parties and go in there to see the show, which is the best that I have seen out here. After it, we have a cheery dinner at the Hotel Cerniclet which is a very nice little place.

On Tuesday, "Bunjie" Rowe came over from the aerodrome at Bruay and took three of us round the sheds. We stayed to tea, and afterwards we all three went for a joy ride. I had the wind up considerably, at first; we seemed to be mounting up at such a terrific speed, and the noise of the wind was simply deafening. I loathed banking round the corners; the whole ground seemed to be tilted at an awful angle. The curious thing is that the height never affected me at all; the whole earth lay out beneath me like a map, and as flat as a map; neither a rise nor fall in the ground was visible, nor hills; everything absolutely flat.

We are being allowed two nights out of billets, so Grover and I have applied to go to Paris. "Bingo" Baines and Giles went to-day, and we shall probably go next week. It ought to be good fun, although we shan't be able to see much in 48 hours. However, I hope to be able to get to Versailles.

I gave a small dinner in Bruay last night. I had asked "Bunjie" to bring two other R.F.C. officers, but he never turned up, because he had had a crash in the afternoon, and was in hospital badly shaken. Thank heaven, he escaped with his life; but no details of how it occurred had come through when I saw these officers.

This village is situated right at the bottom of a valley, and when we go on parade we wind up a narrow little path through a most delicious wood, on to a hill where it is cool and refreshing. The wood is heavenly now, carpeted with a mist of wind flowers, cowslips, dog violets, white violets, blue bells and a few buttercups. How I wish that there was no war on!

We have to enjoy ourselves when the opportunity occurs,



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and often the fun is spoilt by a wire to say that the Brigade is to move in two days. That always puts the damper on. However, we may have a week longer here, and I thoroughly hope so, because men are few and far between now, owing to our heavy casualties at Arras.

*R.J.N.N.* *Hotel Continental,*

*May 19th,* 1917. *Paris.*

You will probably be surprised at the address. I came here on the 17th, arriving very late at night after a journey of 12 hours. Paris is far the nicest town I have ever seen. It beats London into a cocked hat.

Yesterday we went to the Tuileries and Louvre. This hotel overlooks the Tuileries Gardens. We also did a lot of shopping and feeding, perhaps most of the latter! It's good to have a civilised meal. Grover and I are sharing a room together with a bath adjoining, which is heaven. It is the first time since I left home that I have had a bath in a big bath, and not had to hang my legs over the side. You can imagine what an effect all this luxury has on me after five months' absence from civilisation.

Some of the Staff Officers have got their wives over here, and it is glorious to hear *the* language spoken by an English lady. Altogether I am amazed at my surroundings.

Grover and I do the hell of a lot of eating and sleeping. That in itself is a great change!

This morning we took a car to Versailles. A more magnificent place, outside and inside, I have never seen. We went round the galleries, private apartments, and gardens, and we were thunderstruck at the splendour of the place. We drove home through the Bois de Boulogne, with which we have nothing to compare in London.

I think we shall go to Notre Dame to-morrow. We walked down the embankment, past the Louvre, and saw it's towers in the evening sunshine. I shall be sick to leave civilisation!

*R.J.N.N.*

*May 21st,* 1917. *Roclincourt.*

I have just come back from Paris, and never have I enjoyed three days more in my life. It was absolute heaven to have a hot bath every morning and evening, and a carpet on the floor.

You say leave has opened; only for the cavalry who have the soft time, and also the Staff who are nicknamed by the troops "—— in shatoos" or "velvet bottoms." I very much



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doubt if I shall get leave to England till the end of the war, if then! I think that, probably, we shall have our leave to the interior in the future. I shall try to get to the South of France, and, perhaps, you could meet me there. What hopes!! It is no good building castles in the air.

*R.J.N.N.*

*May 30th,* 1917. *Arleux-en-Gohelle.*

"B" Company is now in support, just behind the village, and I am writing this in a dug-out while water is pouring down the steps. A thunderstorm is raging outside, and I am afraid we shall soon be flooded out. It is most unpleasant to hear a waterfall descending into one's home like it is at this moment! Up till now, we have had as good weather as we could hope for, and I trust this deluge will cease in due season.

Many thanks for your congratulations on my promotion. I am very lucky to have risen so quickly. I never noticed my name in the gazette until I was shown it by Harry Spurge when I went over to see the 5th Battalion before coming into the line.

The water is rushing down now in torrents. It's awful!

*June 1st.*

We were completely flooded out of the dug-out on Wednesday. I am now at the Transport Lines having a rest and clean up. I go up to the support again this evening.

On the 30th I went out to reconnoitre ground for a new trench, and, incidentally to try and scupper any Boche knocking around. The whole of No Man's Land was carpeted with Canadians, killed in the attack of May 2nd. The stench was something frightful.

I am hoping to see you very soon. I am due to come home on leave on June 3rd. You must expect me when you see me because Richard Warren and I may have some difficulty in reaching the coast. I hope I shall be home in time to go to Eton for the Fourth of June.

I shall have to do some rather nasty work between now and the 3rd.

*B.H.A.N.*

*June, 16th,* 1917. *Roclincourt.*

Well, here I am, behind the Vimy Ridge trying to keep cool. I got back yesterday morning. All the asparagus was bad, for some unknown reason. I don't think it liked our method of travelling.



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We are under canvas just behind the 6-in. howitzers, and I am not used to the noises of the guns yet.

We were kept waiting in Folkestone from 10 to 5.30 p.m. with nothing to do. There was a heavy sea mist and Dick Warren and I thought that there might be a chance of our not sailing that day. No such luck! We took three hours to get across owing to the fog.

The Commanding Officer is most awfully pleased with the braces. My leave merely seems to have been a very pleasant dream which has suddenly vanished. However, I am all right now that I am back with the Regiment. People talk about us fighting for Belgium and the rights of small nations. As far as I am concerned, they can go to hell. The only satisfaction to me, is to know that we are fighting for England and all that therein is, and home. Home! how far away you seem.

*M.K.N.* *École des Jeunes Filles.*

*June 21st,* 1917. *Béthune.*

I can hardly believe that I have ever been home at all. The novelty of London life struck me as being amazing, almost imcomprehensible. That was due to the fact that our life out here is more uncivilised than we realise. Civilisation does not strike you till you go from one extreme to another.

We have left the Arras area for a far better one. We came here in motor buses yesterday, and we go into the line ——. Ah! not so fast, please!

Apparently, this sector is fairly quiet and there are proper trenches, for the first time in my career out here.

*M.K.N.*

*June 26th,* 1917. *Le Quesnoy.*

We are now on a far better front where there is practically no shelling; on the other hand, there are no rest billets, and we shall be in the trenches for 28 days at a time, which is rather a ghastly prospect. I fear that there is little chance of a wound to bring me home, unless we do a raid or some stunt.

My Company has been in the trenches for the last three days. I am commanding while Giles is away on leave. We had to "stand-to" all Friday night, expecting a raid by the Boche. As I leant up against the parapet in the front line waiting, waiting and waiting, my thoughts wandered back to those divine days at home; in front of us, the night was waning to a grey dawn. It really is wretched having to wait all night on the *qui vive* for a raid. It is really the hell of a strain,



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especially when you are responsible for the defence of the line and the lives of 100 men.

I am down at the Transport Lines for one night as my Company is in support. The gramophone is playing "Un peu d'amour," bringing back memories of Sloley at Christmas 1914. Music is awful for reminding you of lovely times.

The shooting-stick gun is a great novelty. I am going to take it into the trenches with me and try to shoot some of the insolent rats, which sit on the parapet and positively laugh at me as I go my rounds at night. Some of them are as big as cats and fat as butter!

This land of France is most excessively boring, and I am fed up with the war. To think that at this moment the last scene of "Bubbly" is being played, and everyone is preparing to go and try to find a cab. Time 10.45 p.m. All the fine ladies in their fine dresses, enjoying life to the full, and flirting with penniless subalterns to the detriment of both. The contrast is what amazes me. I never knew what war was like when I first came out; now I am bored and have seen enough. On the whole, I am glad I have had the opportunity of fighting for those who can't fight for themselves; but the way some of them talk, makes me doubt whether it is worth the candle.

This boredom is only temporary. I think I need a Number 9.

*R.J.N.N* *Village Line,*

*June 26th,* 1917. *Canal Right Sub-Sector.*

I fear that I have been rather a long time in writing to you, the fact of the matter being that I have had more to do lately than I expected. We are now in the line opposite La Bassée. The Canal is on our left.

We were rushed away from the Vimy Ridge area in buses to come up here and take over from the 66th Division, which as rumour has it, was lost in England for two years!

"B" went into the front line on Friday the 22nd, and we came down to support here last night. This part of the line is an absolute rest cure compared to any I have been in so far. There are communication trenches right up to the front line. Up till now I have been accustomed to relieve over the top. I don't mind how long we stay here!

On the night of the 23rd we were warned that the enemy might make a raid on the Regiment's front. As Giles is on leave I am in command of the Company. We stood-to-arms all night, but no raid was attempted. They would have got an awful hotting if they had tried.



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I came up ahead of the Company, when we relieved the 2/4th East Lancashires on the 22nd, and while I was taking over, two Boches came and gave themselves up to the garrison of one of the sap-heads. They must have crawled up the mine crater into the post. They appeared in broad daylight, and seemed to be as pleased as Punch to be in our lines. They were Alsatian conscripts, and only spoke German because they had been compelled by the Boches. They volunteered their hatred for the Boche, and when I asked them why, they gave as their reason, the scarcity of food. They showed me their ration which did look inadequate, yet they did not look thin; in fact they seemed to be able to thrive on what there was for them to eat.

I am amazed at the absence of shell fire. There are, however, certain things to be wary of, viz. "minnies," rifle grenades and "pineapples." The former are the deuce, and do a great deal of damage. They contain 120 lbs. of high explosive fired from a trench mortar, and are nicknamed "Rum Jars" from their appearance as they sail through the air. The latter are light trench mortar bombs like an aerial torpedo. They have vanes on their tails which keep them accurate in direction. They are so called because the body of the bomb is serrated into little squares. It is possible to have as many as 15 to 20 in the air at the same time, but our Stokes mortar can have more than that. Lastly, there is a terrible "minny" known as the "Flying Pig."

The Regiment will be here most probably for a long time holding the line, but, of course, you never know. We were badly swindled out of our rest by being sent here. I am not a thousand yards from the front line, yet behind me are cultivated fields and French men and women in Annequin beyond. Isn't that marvellous?

*R.J.N.N.*

*July 1st, 1917.* *Tower Reserve Trench.*

We are still in the trenches, and as far as I can see, we are likely to remain here some time longer. The weather has been atrocious too, and we have to wade up to our knees in liquid mud in some parts of the trench. The outlook is rather dismal because there is nix to look forward to. Paris leave has been stopped from the first of this month, except, of course, for the Staff. I hear that J is on leave again. I thought he must have made a mistake when he wrote and told me that he had refused it.

I was very interested in the Mesopotamia Commission. I suppose that has been one of the worst managed and worst organised expeditions that has ever fought a fight. So truly



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British ; so like our economical-minded Government. I wonder what Hardinge will say to clear himself.

This trench warfare is most monotonous and boring. There is nothing to do, either when on or off duty. But the Boche is very quiet which is kind of him.

I spent last night in the detached post in the Mill Tunnel, garrisoned by thirty men. No one seemed to know the exact direction of the Hun trenches, so I spent my time wandering about, trying to find our posts over the top, and fell into countless shell-holes full of water and mud. However, for duty in this particular post we are supplied with thigh gum boots which keep us dry, but also are very necessary because the bottom of the tunnel, which connects the posts, is at water level ! You can imagine how hard it is to tell the direction of the enemy when you emerge from the tunnel into the posts. You cannot possibly tell which way you have travelled under ground.

We have just had news that Harry Spurge is coming back to us again. He had the command of this Company for a month, but he is now going to take command of " A."

*July 2nd.*

I have had a refreshing sleep in the Village Line. I watched a marvellous firework display last night. Our guns were bombarding the Boches on the left with our new blazing oil shells. I expect you have read about them in the papers. It was quite dark, and we could see the shells burst into a gorgeous flame, which sent long arms of fire shooting to the earth. Some shot the flaming liquid in a fan of fire, while others burst on percussion, producing the effect of a fountain of fire. The whole sky was lit up and it was a lovely sight to watch. The troops were tickled to death with the show ; I heard a man say, " That's drumming Jerry up, not 'arf." I only hope the Boche has not got any stuff like it for us !

It is a nice fine morning, and I am writing this just outside the dug-out, sitting in the sun. We have had many such mornings which have terminated in awful thunderstorms in the afternoon. My news is meagre, as this is my tenth day in the trenches.

*M.K.N.*

*July 8th*, 1917. *Le Preole.*

In spite of the fact that you are the hardest worked member of the family, you write to me more often than anyone else. Thank you most awfully for the birthday presents.

We came out of the line on the 6th for a week's rest. We are quite near the Canal, where there is good bathing.



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On Friday, "Shiny," Dick and I went over to a flying Squadron to be told what the Flying Corps do, when an attack is on, etc. "Shiny" managed to get a flight, but Dick and I were not so fortunate.

I think I told you that all Paris leave has been stopped, except for the Staff!!

*B.H.A.N.*

*July 13th*, 1917. *Le Quesnoy.*

You have guessed rather well where the Regiment is.

Last night the Boches tried to kill us all with gas shells, and it was my turn for duty too! They started popping them over about 12 midnight. The cry came down the trench, "Gas." "B" Company was in immediate support with gas sentries on duty, whom I had to visit during my tour of duty. The shelling went on for half an hour, and I stumbled round the trenches wearing my gas mask, running into the traverses and barking my bare knees on the revetting. It was pitch black and doubly hard to see with a respirator on, but I found all the men wearing their respirators and joking with each other.

There were only four casualties at the time. A shell burst right outside a dug-out and the gas went straight down the stairs and gassed our stretcher-bearers and sanitary corporal who were the oldest soldiers in the Company. One has since died. When I saw them in the Aid Post, one poor devil was coughing and spitting his very soul out. How I blessed my box respirator!

I have just come back from having a swim in the baths at Béthune.

*B.H.A.N.*

*July 17th*, 1917. *Cambrin.*

I am feeling quite fit again now. My tummy-ache was only temporary, I am glad to say, though it was rather distressing while it lasted.

I never bathed once when we had our six days rest at Le Preole. The weather turned cold as soon as we left the trenches, and the water did not look at all attractive. It is even more like "marmalade and dead dogs" than the Ant at Irstead.

We have not had much opportunity of playing polo lately owing to this continual front line work. Also the horses have a good bit of work to do in a day nowadays. We ride the pack animals which bring up rations, as well as the Company chargers.

What wouldn't I give to be at home now on this lovely July day. I can see Barton Broad in my mind's eye, with the



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glittering white sails and the "unnumbered laughter of the waves." What it is to be able to remember!

*M.K.N.* *Cambrin,*

*July 24th,* 1917. *Right Front.*

I got your letter the other day, saying that you had sent me a cake from Buzzard. A perfectly enormous cake did arrive and was most welcome, but there was no card or anything to say from whom it came. I thought it must have hailed from an unknown admirer!

We are still in the trenches; and the cake was eaten at all hours from 3 in the morning until 3 the following morning by all officers on duty.

The last two nights I have spent on patrol, which does not amuse me much; it's too exciting. Our wire is most awfully hard to negotiate, and I get hung up and torn most unmercifully. I was never made for a boy scout to crawl on my belly, for my displacement is too great. Patrolling would be very good fun, if only the enemy had no rifles, bombs, or machine guns, which take the interest out of the whole affair. I fear that I am no soldier; the longer I stay out here, the more I seem to reverence the Boche and his ways, and his shells, and his "minnies," and his rifle grenades, and bullets. Perhaps it is natural, and yet I have had a very soft eight months of it.

We are living the life of rats, who only venture forth at night, and the whole thing is most horribly monotonous. The weather has become perfectly glorious which makes this life more irksome, because I feel that I was not made to live like this in glorious sunny summer weather. The trenches have become as hot as ovens, and the flies are breeding as only flies can. Never mind, it will be over soon.

*R.J.N.N.*

*July 28th,* 1917. *The Mill.*

I am sorry to have left you so long without a letter, but I am too bored to write about nothing in particular. All the news seems to be on your side of the water. Can you tell me anything that is at all optimistic, because I am blowed if I can see anything bright on the horizon? The shipping losses have increased this last week rather badly, which shows that we have not quite solved the submarine problem.

I see that Ginnell was forcibly removed from the House the other day. That must have been quite a funny little episode.



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Yesterday I went down early to the Transport Lines, and then went with "Twitt" Drake to hear the Archbishop of York speak at Bruay. It was a lovely day, and I enjoyed our trip. There were two officers from each regiment in the Army, as well as many padres, and we were packed like sardines in the little theatre. I happened to sit next to an officer in the 52nd Canadians. General Horne, the Army Commander, introduced the Archbishop. I was not very impressed by his lecture. I was sitting right at the back of the theatre and he seemed to lower his voice at the end of a sentence, which is a criminal fault in any speaker. He laid great stress on self discipline and the duties of an officer after the war, and said that he thought the men, who had done the fighting, would have the first word in everything, which, to my mind, is impossible. He spoke for an hour, and when he had finished, Horne got up and said in five minutes all that it had taken an hour for the Archbishop to say, and the latter admitted it! I did not see Sackie McCorquodale, but I expect he was there somewhere.

Afterwards, "Twitt" and I called on the 40th Squadron R.F.C. where there is a mutual O.E. friend in command. We stayed the night at the Hotel Cerniclet, and lorry-hopped back this morning. I am now all alone in command of the detached post. The loneliness is very boring, and time hangs heavy. I don't know when we are going out for a rest; the men are getting pretty fed up with being stuck in the trenches so long, although this sector is so quiet.

On the night of the 26th the Regiment did a feint raid to draw fire from the actual raid being carried out by the 74th astride the La Bassée road on our left. Murray's sapping platoon had made dummy figures which were put out in No Man's Land. These dummies were made in three sizes, big, medium and smallish, and were pulled into a vertical position by wires manipulated from the front line. The big ones were put nearest the enemy wire and were the last to be elevated, the idea being that the Boche would get the illusion of men advancing!

At the appointed time, we fired a Bangalore torpedo under the enemy's wire and then sent up the German S.O.S. signal. At the same moment, Murray pulled up the first set of dummies which were lying just in front of our parapet; down came the Boche barrage and up went the second line of advancing dummies!

After the pucka raiding party had returned the dummies were collected from No Man's Land and found to be fairly riddled!

There is some rather strong evidence of spying from the village immediately behind the line. Two carrier pigeons were



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seen by a lance-corporal of "B" to fly out of a house straight towards the Boche lines. The inhabitants, an old woman and a young man, came out and had a look at our corporal and then went in again. He said they seemed to want to see if he had noticed anything. It is sickening to think that these French people may be betraying their allies, who have prevented the enemy from taking their village. There may be nothing in the corporal's story. How he recognised the pigeons to be carriers, I don't know!

*B.H.A.N.* *The Mill,*

*July 29th,* 1917. *La Bassée Road.*

I am sending you a small photograph of myself taken by —— when I had just come out of the trenches. As will be seen by the placard it is for "Officers only"!

I have nothing whatever to report from the Western Front. It is quiet enough for the King to come here now.

The Commanding Officer is now on leave, which is a great wonder. I think he enjoyed himself more on his first leave than he realised at the time. Apparently he spends all his leave in connection with the Regiment, either strafing the 3rd Battalion, or arranging for certain officers to come out to the 52nd. He is a perfectly amazing man.

*M.K.N.*

*August 2nd,* 1917. *Cambrin.*

I agree with you most heartily, that England is fighting, not with her temper, but with her body. We are fighting for ideals too, which is strange for our country. I don't think that anyone really hates the individual German with a mortal antagonism. We want to exterminate, not so much the Germans as individuals, for they are harmless enough, but their methods and principles: and the worst of it is, that there is only one way to do this, and that is to kill the individuals. If only we could get hold of these abstract principles, turn them into concrete, and then blow them all off the face of the earth, our end would be attained. All this frightfulness is due to the drive of one or two men, who have used the less educated classes to carry it out, and who have drilled into the minds of the masses the slogan, "might is right." The men here don't hate the Boches because they are Boches, but they hate them as an enemy, and for what they have done or are supposed to have done. Belgium and her rights, the occupation of Serbia, never enter anyone's thoughts at all. We are fighting for those at home, to save them from the fate of Belgium and Serbia.



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People at home—from what I gathered when on leave—seem to be obsessed with the idea that the Army will fight to the death to avenge Belgium. Nothing is further from the truth. We shall go on fighting until we are told to stop.

It is very curious to hear some of the answers that the men give to the question, "What are you fighting for?" Some have not the foggiest idea, while others who don't know, also don't care.

A war may be righteous, as the parsons say, but it is really nothing short of wicked. It is fearfully hard to define what one is fighting for; but, although men may not know, I feel assured that each man has some reason, which is worth a world more than any that the politicians can produce in a year.

*R.J.N.N.*

*August 9th,* 1917. *Cambrin.*

"Once more into the line, dear friends, once more," amid our old haunts, after a very short, but pleasant rest. The weather was too bad to do much while we were resting, and the ground too wet for polo.

On the 7th, General Eden, who used to command the 52nd, Major Ruck-Keene and Lord Fitzwilliam came over to lunch, and yesterday I heard of "Tiger" Wyld from Guy Blewitt who is quite close to him.

This bad weather seems to have put a stop to our progress in the north. The Almighty seems to work against us.

I have just been digging in the front line. There are layers of duckboards, sometimes four and five deep, in the bottom of the trenches. These we pull up so as to allow water to accumulate below, while the duckboard rests on props, and thus we can keep dry. Serjeant Roberts and I pulled up two just now, and found a third still embedded in the most foul filth, consisting of dark green slime reeking with disgusting decomposition. That sort of smell seems to penetrate everything and remains in your nostrils for some time, like the smell of a dead man. Our dug-out is very smart now, hung with green latrine canvas and sundry pictures of fair females! In these parts the war is quite a luxury!

*M.K.N.*

*August 9th,* 1917. *Cambrin.*

The reason that I have not written to you for some little time is that we have been resting at Le Preole. We are now back in the trenches.



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I expect you are beginning to feel the intense monotony of your work; it must be far worse than this trench warfare, because we always have the enemy to divert our attention.

I was down at the Transport Lines at Le Quesnoy last night, for my 24 hours rest. At about 3.15 a.m. I was suddenly awakened by a very loud explosion which seemed pretty close; then I realised that there must be a Boche plane overhead, because I could hear the droning of an engine. It is the first time that I have ever been near falling bombs, and the sensation is distinctly unpleasant, on the whole. You have not got the ghost of a chance, for you cannot hear them coming, like shells. However, I don't think the bombs did much damage, and our planes went up after him pretty quickly.

The mosquitoes and gnats are a perfect curse now; and while we were in billets, their shrill notes, at night, used to keep me awake. They bite like blazes, as do the horse flies.

Billy Barnard is on his way up to the Regiment. It will be nice to have him here as well; he is a great chap, full of spirits and fun.

Guy Blewitt was over here yesterday. I saw him for one moment and asked after Jasper Wyld. Guy is the hell of a man with a D.S.O. and M.C. and a Montenegrin order, which has a very pretty ribbon.

I must close now, as I am on duty from 10.30 to 12.30, and then we stand-to-arms at 3.45 a.m. I always loathe the war at "stand-to." I feel that I would give a fiver to be allowed to go back to sleep. And that is why we have to "stand-to." I think, too, that there are greater things in the air than Zeppelins, and that something will happen soon which will startle everyone. That is only a conjecture.

*M.K.N.* *Lock House,*

*August 19th,* 1917. *Givenchy.*

I have just returned from three days of heavenly rest in Paris. We have been in and out of the trenches for two months now.

I had a perfectly lovely time and went to the Vaudeville three times; it seemed to be what "Bubbly" was, when I was on leave. I have managed to keep three tunes in my head. It was marvellous to have a change of scenery. We went to the Bois de Boulogne and had an excellent lunch, outside under the trees at Armenonville, and we went to as many shows as we could possibly cram in.

The 52nd is now in support, and "B" Company is by the Canal. Billy Barnard and I have just had a bathe, which was spoilt by the Boche, who sent over some 5.9's, the bits of which splashed in the water close to us. Naked as I was, I felt



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doubly so, when the brutes began to shell. The water was very warm and we are thinking of having another try later on.

I am now sitting by the waters of the Canal, writing this in the sun. It is just the sort of day we used to spend on the Broads; just enough breeze to keep the sail full.

Paris swarms with Americans, Russians, and Belgians—the three allies who do so little—anyway, America is taking a long time to begin!

The mosquitoes are pretty bad still in these parts, but someone has sent me some excellent stuff to put on hands and face to keep them off, which is really very effective, but most evil-smelling.

I think it is pretty scandalous that people should go to the Intercession Service just to see the King.

*B.H.A.N.*

*August 22nd,* 1917. *Brickstacks.*

I have had some difficulty in finding news, so Field (O.C. "B" Company) and "Bugler" Ames have suggested a few things. Field's suggestions are:—

(1.) That we are going to have a company of Portuguese attached to the Regiment in a few days' time; one platoon to each Company. How we are to understand each other is beyond me or them. We have got to teach them how to patrol, fire rifle grenades, keep themselves clean, show them which end of the rifle the noise comes from, etc. Won't that be good fun?

(2.) At "stand-to" I potted at two Boches and missed them. I had another shot and they ran like hell. Now I have got a rifle grenade emplacement registered on the spot, and we will give them a salvo to-morrow if they show themselves. I think we have got the spot pretty well taped. It's most awfully good fun pooping off these grenades.

(3.) We are hoping to go out for a few days rest soon, but our allotment has been cut down by half, owing to the attachment of these blamed Portugooses to the Brigade. We shall probably have a week-end out of the line and then go straight in again.

(4.) Giles has just come back from Nice, where he has been on leave with "Bingo" Baines. He says the ladies are simply divine. What a fatuous remark, for who is there who would dare to contradict him. So much for Field's suggestions.

I have just found the "Bugler" (Ames) fiddling about with the fuse and detonator of a Mills bomb! He asks me, "What is this funny little thing," pointing to the detonator containing fulminate of mercury. He must know the hell of



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a lot about bombs! He is trying to frighten me, the dirty dog! His suggestions are :—

(1.) He hopes or rather "hoppes that you are in the pink," and sends his love. Rather forward, isn't he?

(2.) I am looking forward to coming home on leave soon.

I am not really, because it is far too unlikely. "Shiny" and "Fritz" have just come back.

Now there are my suggestions. Aunt Mary wrote and told me that she had written to you to send me out thin muslin shirts dipped in creosote to keep off the mosquitoes and vermin, etc. Please don't do anything of the kind. I would rather be bitten to death by mosquitoes and lifted away by lice than have that awful smell of creosote about. As if we don't get enough of it, as it is!!

I enjoyed myself most awfully in Paris. I am feeling better than I have felt for a long time. It's a joy to be alive on such a day as this.

*M.K.N.*

*August 22nd,* 1917. *Cuinchy Brickstacks.*

We are in the front line again, and it is ever so quiet; nothing doing either by day or night. Last night I took a patrol out from Lunatic Sap, crossed the crater and our wire, and then made for the sap on the Boche side of the crater. We found it empty which was lucky! I told my men, by sign, to fan out and cover me while I had a look at the enemy's position. In the sap-head, I found a small hand-bell, probably used as a gas alarm bell. I wrapped my handkerchief round the clapper and stuffed it in my pocket. We then patrolled along his front line for about a 100 yards: I, worming my way along his parapet. No sign of a Boche! So then we waited a bit in case the "Verey Light Corporal" should come along, because lights are often sent up from his front line. Even he seemed to be off duty last night! The blinking bell in my pocket put the wind up me, because I was terrified that the "hankie" would work loose and the clapper would peal a clarion. So I kept my hand on it and prayed to heaven that I should not have to use my revolver. However, I got back safely with my souvenir in my pocket. I had to send it down to Headquarters as evidence of my route, and, I am told, the bell will have to be forwarded to Brigade. I should like it as a souvenir.

Then again this morning, I saw two Boche walking about in their support line, so I had a shot at them. They ducked, and I had another shot at them and they ran like hell. I wish I had killed them. I don't think I even hit one of them; I was a trifle excited, I think, because I wanted my Boche



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before breakfast. However, I am going to register some rifle grenades on that spot and see if I can't catch them to-morrow. Its great fun shooting at human rabbits! I only hope they won't return the compliment and try to snipe me! We have the bulge on them in the very early morning, because the sky gets light behind them and they show up, while I imagine we don't show at all.

Yesterday, in the evening, our gunners carried out a bombardment of the enemy's lines and he retaliated weakly by chucking "minnies" at us. The explosion and concussion of these mortars is something terrific, and I came down with a headache.

News has just come through that the French have captured 5,000 prisoners at Verdun and the Italians 10,000. Good news. I wonder if it will make any difference; the French are simply marvellous; in fact beyond all praise.

*R.J.N.N.*

*August 23rd,* 1917. *Brickstacks.*

I had some good fun this morning. I spotted a Boche at "stand-to" and had a shot at him. There was one of our snipers observing for me, and he said that the Boche never moved from where he fell. To make sure of him, I put six rounds rapid with rifle grenades on the spot, so that, I think, if he was wounded by the bullet, he must have been put out of mess by the grenades.

I arrived back from Paris on the 18th after a superlative four days' leave. The town is crowded with Americans who behave as if they have bought the place. I suppose they can't help it. I am hoping that my turn for English leave will come round again soon. I thought at one time that we should be getting long leave while the Army fills in trenches! I am beginning to think that the seventh year will be the worst, and after that, every fourteenth!!

It seems that England is the mainstay of this war, but we, out here, rely on those at home to do their job properly just as you rely on us. How is it then, that people in high positions, holding a certain amount of influence, are allowed to make exhibitions of themselves like Henderson. There is something wrong that he is tolerated at all. And why do we allow men like him and Ramsay Macdonald and Winston to have anything to do with the Government of the country? Surely Winston has played with sufficient men's lives? Surely his censure after Gallipoli was enough to end his political career?



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*R.J.N.N.*

*August 25th*, 1917. *Cuinchy Brickstacks.*

I have told you about the Boche habit of walking about behind their lines at "stand-to." Yesterday Roger Ames and I had most awfully good fun. It was a glorious sunny morning, so we made a new emplacement for rifle grenades and registered them on the spot whence we had seen the Boches going to and fro at "stand-to." Probably there is a dug-out, because they appear between the brickstacks frequently in the half light before dawn.

Well, I crawled out over the parapet and sat in a very big shell-hole from which I could observe the fall and burst of the grenades through my glasses. Having found the range, we tried a salvo of six at a time, fired from one stand of rifles simultaneously.

Now, at breakfast George Field had told us that the Colonel had sent a message up to say that the Brigadier was coming to inspect the trenches. I am afraid that Roger and I were very naughty, and rather hoped that, if we badgered the enemy sufficiently, we might persuade him to retaliate just about the time the Brigadier was due to come round.

As it so happened, the old man arrived while we were doing a shoot. He said "good morning" to me from the trench, and asked what we were shooting at. I explained the situation, and that there had been a lot of movement round the spot where we were shooting, and that I suspected the presence of a dug-out.

"Very good, my boy. But what can you see?"

"Would you like to come and have a look, Sir?" said I.

"Oh! No. I must get on. I have got to be back at Division by 12.30."

I caught the Colonel's eye and thought I saw a twinkle of amusement in it.

By the time the poor Brigadier had reached us he was exceedingly hot from having negotiated the long tunnels and many steps, and the sun, moreover, was hot. As a visible proof of this, there was a drop of sweat hanging on the tip of his nose.

However, he seemed very pleased at the offensive spirit which Roger and I were manifesting to the troops, and him in particular, so we carried on and sent over two more salvos, each of 12 grenades, and hoped to have our efforts reported in the Brigade "Comic Cuts" as '"B" Company, 52nd Light Infantry, carried out a shoot on a suspected enemy dug-out under No. 1 Brickstack, firing in all fifty grenades,' and achieve merit thereby.



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Our plan could not have been more successful. From my coign of vantage, I could see four tin hats bobbing along the trench towards the entrance to the tunnel, and just as the first tin hat reached the steps, there was a boom from the enemy's guns and three whizzbangs burst in rapid succession around the spot. Thank heaven, they were wide of the entrance and the Commanding Officer.

We heard afterwards that the Brigadier was just about to descend the steps when the first shell arrived, and that he got from top to bottom in record time.

I don't know, but I think that the Commanding Officer knew that we were up to no good, and were having a game. He's a marvellous man.

*R.J.N.N.*

*August 27th,* 1917. *Le Preole.*

We came out of the line last night, marching from the front line in box respirators to give us practice. It gave me some unneeded practice in bad language, that's all! Of course, it is raining like hell, now that we are out. In the line the weather was perfect.

Everyone has gone to Béthune, but I can't because I am utterly broke till September 1st.

There are great stunts going on now, on this small piece of front. Officers seem to have the habit of going over the top on daylight patrols to try and snaffle a Boche. I am itching to try and make a prisoner, and am going to evolve a scheme to effect this. It means watching all day to see where the Boches are holding posts.

I think I told you that I accounted for a Fritz the other morning. I must have done the brute in all right. During the last tour the Regiment accounted for about 15 Boches from sniping alone.

My job now is to poop off rifle grenades and patrol at night. The latter is rather a mouth-drying game, because there is always the possibility of a hostile patrol cutting off the line of retirement. However, it is sufficiently exciting and you are safe providing the men stick to you, and don't show themselves.

I am in the pink of health in every way, praise be to Allah! I feel better than I have ever done in my life, but I wish the latter was more certain, and then trench warfare would be really interesting.

I nearly stopped a bit of "pineapple," yesterday; it burst just over the parapet, but did me no damage. I might have got a nice cushy one. The heavy trench mortars are awful



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things. They weigh 120 lbs. and have a charge of 80 lbs. of ammonal! Some draught, I can tell you!

*M.K.N.*

*August 31st*, 1917. *Le Quesnoy.*

At the present moment I am down at the Transport, feeling rather sorry for myself. A few days ago I was bitten by a poisonous mosquito, and now my head is bandaged up so that I can hardly open my mouth. The brute bit me just on the right jawbone; this morning McTurk probed about to get the pus out. As I am liable to get toothache on that side also, I feel pretty miserable. Everyone else is out riding, but I felt I could not go, with a ruddy great bandage round my napper. I hope now that it will soon go away and not leave a nasty scar.

I think I told you of my souvenir, the gas alarm bell. I am going to try and pinch a living one, but I don't know if my little plan will come off; the Colonel may not allow it.

By the way, I never told any of you that I was detailed to lead a raid on July 27th or 28th. I did all the preliminary patrolling, and found a way across the craters in front of Cambrin. The Boche wire was pretty thick; and the idea was to put a Bangalore torpedo under their wire and the ignition of it was to be the signal for the assault. Eventually, the scheme was cancelled, and the 74th did it, astride the La Bassée road. As I said to "Bingo" Baines at the time, it was a case of a M.C., W.C., or C.M.; in other words, a Military Cross, Wooden Cross or Court-Martial! There was only a narrow causeway across the craters, over which the whole of the raiding party would have had to pass, and one Boche machine gun could have wiped out the lot of us.

In any case, if the 52nd does a raid, "B" Company find the men, and I lead it, as the Company and I are next on the roster. So that is something to look forward to!!

There is wind up at the moment, that the Boche is going to cut up rough on our front. He will get the hell of a time, if he tries any games on us. However, he seems to know when there are "Geese" flying about.

Keep your end up, and I will try to keep mine.

*R.J.N.N.*

*September 1st*, 1917. *Cambrin.*

We are still in the blinking trenches; never out of them. My world is now bounded by a parapet and parados, except for the little gleams of sunlight in a letter from home. But we



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are very well off in this part of the line, and have nothing to complain about really.

Billy Barnard and I are now eating fish cakes in our dug-out and jolly good they are too! This dug-out is much more comfortable than it used to be. The walls have been boarded up to prevent the rats from eating our rations. Formerly they used to run over one at night, which was far from pleasant.

My mosquito bite has suppurated and necessitated a bandage round my napper. McTurk lanced it yesterday, and it is much better to-day.

I have practically finished my dinner, and am going to spend the night in the Mill, the detached post. The atmosphere in the dug-out is the worst feature of my sojourn therein. The concentrated "pauperic acid gas" has to be encountered to be believed!

*B.H.A.N.* *Braddell Castle,*

*September 4th,* 1917. *Cuinchy.*

I am feeling pretty bucked with life, all things considered; partly because my mosquito bite has subsided to a normal size, and partly because leave has been extended from 10 to 14 days, and my turn will soon be round now. Some of the men going on leave now, had their last leave in June 1916. Isn't that an awful long time to wait? Nine months ago to-day I was just wondering what France and the war would be like.

The weather now is simply heavenly; those clear September skies with a sun as hot as man can wish. This morning early it was very cold, and there was a heavy roke enveloping everything; in fact an ideal morning for a raid.

By the way, the Boche made a raid just on our right on the 2nd. I was holding the Mill, which is an isolated post just on the right of the La Bassée road. There is a tunnel underneath it, with exits to small posts, shallow and conspicuous. It has always struck me as a potential death trap. At first, I thought we were going to come in for the raid, because we saw parties of Deutsches in the moonlight going out of one trench into another, just for all the world as if they were forming up for a raid. Then, punctually at 5 a.m. they put down a barrage on the Mill, and I really thought I was in for a scrap with some Teutons. The little garrison "stood-to" on the steps of the tunnel, and I sat at the top ready to rush out when they came. I must say I never felt in a less pugilistic mood! The damnable thing about a raid is, that the Teutons put down a "box barrage" all round the area to be raided, to prevent the approach of supports from the rear or flanks. They follow close under the barrage and, as soon as



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it lifts they are on you like lightning before you can man your trenches or posts. That is the idea. Not only do you have your front line plastered to hell with shells and "minnies," but also the "box" part of the barrage prevents you getting hold of fresh men to replace casualties, and the Boche can therefore outnumber your area, if he has a good barrage to follow under. I was damned thankful that they went and visited someone else and not us!!

I am now waiting in great expectancy for the mail to come in. Thrice blessed mail, the soldier's only joy, or one of his only joys! Here comes the mail. Hurrah!

No letter from home as usual; only a filthy stinking pass book! What is the matter with you all? Can't you find any pens? The last letter I had from home was written on August 25th, ten blooming days ago.

I enclose another Field Message form for you to write to me on! Just sign your name!

*M.K.N.* *Braddell Castle,*

*September 5th,* 1917. *Cuinchy.*

The Regiment is now in support, which is a great relief, because we do not have to do any duty, night or day. This afternoon I bathed in the Canal; the water was pretty cool, but the sun was baking hot.

The swelling on my face has gone down, but I fear that the bite will leave a scar like the one caused by that loathsome boil.

There is a good deal of hot air about the Boche making a raid in force on our front. They made one the other morning, away on the right, to see, apparently if there were any "Geese" about.

The mornings are becoming foggy; how I loathe fogs out here, for one never knows what the enemy is doing under cover of them.

*B.H.A.N.* *Transport Lines,*

*September 7th,* 1917. *Le Quesnoy.*

At last I have had a letter from you, the first for about three weeks. I think that is a perfectly heavenly idea of Granny's, that "the horses out here sleep in bell tents." it's almost worthy of *Punch.*

It is a great pity that Dad has got to plough up the park, but even so, when the war is over, he can put it down into grass again, and when once the war is over, no one will mind what prospect there is from the house, will he?



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I spent last night on a working party, burying cables, forwards from Fanshawe Castle. The place where we were digging was open and apt to be swept by machine guns, but the bullets were spent by the time they reached us. There was little chance of being severely hit, so long as you stood up straight. We got back after four hours digging, and had no casualties.

*M.K.N.*

*September 9th,* 1917. *Robertson's Tunnel.*

I have just had my lunch, and am on duty in the front line till 4 p.m. The sky is a perfect blue, dotted here and there with little white clouds; a real summer day and O! so hot! I cannot sit in the sun because the light is too dazzling; instead, I am sitting under a rickety shelter in the cool.

I must tell you what little news there is. "Bingo" Baines has left us to-day, to take command of the 2/7th Liverpuddlers. He came round last night to say good-bye to all of us, and was very sad at having to go. I owe him a great debt of gratitude for what he did for me when I first joined the Regiment. There is some chance of Brett coming back to us as Senior Major; he left us last January to go on a Senior Officer's Course, and then was posted to the 17th Royal Fusiliers, as second in command. He is the only possible person who can fill "Bingo's" place.

Next, our Doctor, dear old McTurk, is leaving us on the 16th. His year of service is up, and he is going back to civil life. He is great fun, and we shall miss him too.

This part of the line is as quiet as ever; there has been nothing doing at all lately, either exciting or interesting. The Boches don't show themselves as much as they used. I think we must have inflicted some casualties by sniping and rifle grenades. At the moment, I am attached to "C" Company, which is short of officers. "B" is on the immediate left, so that I can see them any time.

*B.H.A.N.*

*September 12th,* 1917. *Cuinchy Brickstacks.*

Now, of course, letters are pouring in!! So, some of my letters have brought forth fruit in due season.

To-day I am feeling depressed. The news from Russia is enough to depress anyone or anything. Also, I am going to spend the night in the gentle art of wiring, which, though an art, is really far from gentle! I came up from the Transport Lines to-day, and that has also caused depression, because



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I had to leave the "Bubbly" records behind. They cheered me up more than anything lately.

The 14 days leave is only a rumour, but I believe there is truth in the news that leave is going to be more frequent in future; it is to come round once in four months.

*M.K.N.* *The Culvert.*

*September 13th, 1917.* *Cuinchy Brickstacks.*

I am now attached to "D" Company, and in support to them with my platoon. I have been listening to a very vivid account of the retreat of the 10th Irish Division through Serbia, from "Nobby" Clarke. I was simply amazed at what he had been through, while acting with a platoon as rearguard to his regiment. He was cut off twice by the Bulgars, and completely separated from the rest of the British Force; yet he managed to evade the enemy.

He landed at Salonika in Mesopotamian kit, and then had to go through a Balkan winter in shorts! Twenty degrees below zero! I heard how, on one occasion, he took a sentry off the fire step and the sentry left his feet in his boots, frozen to the ground! How he saw the Scottish nurses who had retreated all the way from Belgrade, sleeping by the roadside, marching with the men, leading their pack mules, in the fighting line with the troops, enduring all their hardships and yet not giving in; their kit torn to ribbons, no hats, no skirts, albeit perfectly wonderful.

And this officer, who had been attacked and surrounded, who had charged with the bayonet time and again, because the bolts of the rifles were frozen, has got no reward. No Honours list has come out for that campaign; a great retreat, terrific cold, only one field gun in support, boots worn out, clothes practically non-existent, and yet no official mention.

He told of how he saw some Zouaves attack and carry all before them, knifing the Bulgars and slitting them up; how they re-formed and charged again.

In the last lap of the retreat, he was in command of the rearguard left to hold a pass for four hours at all costs. He retired at the end of four hours and marched, until his men could go no further; so he formed a square and slept till dawn. On waking up, he saw Bulgars in his rear, so each man of his party picked out a Bulgar and they fired together. The Bulgars blew bugles and beat drums, and under cover of this commotion, he was able to slip round a spur and eventually reach Greek soil. Apparently, he only lost 5 men out of 20. I have never heard a more vivid account of fighting. He was under orders to join the 43rd when he shipped and landed at Salonika.



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It is very interesting to hear of these side-shows, which in most cases have proved worse than the main campaign. However, no other front experiences the shelling that we get here.

*R.J.N.N.*

*September* 16*th*, 1917. *Cambrin.*

There has been nothing whatever exciting on our piece of front, and of fighting, as little as ever. Also there is not so much patrolling these days. Up till a little while ago, there was a patrol out every night, but, nowadays, only when there is some definite object to be attained.

Yesterday I had my Platoon Serjeant, Boddington by name, sniped through the head, but not killed, thank God. He was damned lucky, the bullet, hitting a sandbag, ricocheted into three pieces, of which one hit him in the nose and the other two split his helmet. The latter undoubtedly saved his life. He had been looking over the top at two Boches, who had just thrown a bomb, and he was getting direction to fire a rifle grenade at them when the sniper pipped him. I had been doing exactly the same thing a little further to the left, and had heard the bullet sing over my head soon after popping down behind the parapet, after getting the direction of the brutes. The Serjeant lost a lot of blood, but seemed quite cheery when I bid him good-bye in the Aid Post.

Ames, who was next for leave, has had his hopes bitched by a Divisional Order which states that no officer, who is out for the first time as an officer, can get leave until he has done five months in the country.

Just as I had written those last words, a Serjeant came in and said, " Beg pardon, Sir, Mr. Ames has had his leg blown off." I seized my helmet and rushed upstairs to find him lying stretched on the firestep. His right leg was shattered above the ankle. All he said was, " Isn't this bloody." So he has got his leave after all !

*B.H.A.N.*

*September* 18*th*, 1917. *Le Preole.*

I did not answer your letter at once because I received it on the day poor " Bugler " Ames was wounded. He was hit in the right leg, and the bone is fractured in two places ; his right cheek was badly burned, and his right eye affected ; also he had a nasty cut on his right hand too.

A " pineapple " burst right at his feet, and it was damned lucky he was not blown off the face of the earth. I miss his



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cheery face very much ; and we had so much in common, being at Eton together. He had been out just over three months.

As the Regiment is out of the line in Brigade reserve, I have been over to Béthune twice to see him, and he seems quite happy, except that he cannot read yet or sleep at night.

We are having a topping time, riding, swimming, etc.

*M.K.N.*

*September 20th,* 1917. *Le Preole.*

You ask me what " Geese " mean. They are the inhabitants of Portugal, our noble allies and not " those dagos " according to a recent Order. They were also called " gallant " in the latter Order !

I was rather amused that you were anxious about me the other day, because I was rather anxious about myself ! I had three very narrow escapes on three separate occasions ; it is rather extraordinary that you should have known about it !

Dick Warren has just got the M.C. for a daylight patrol. Isn't it good ?

We have now got a Yankee Doctor ; English ones are very scarce. This chap's name is Schmidt. He was arrested on his second day in the line by two men of the 74th who had never seen an American uniform before ; they took him for a spy, and when they asked him his name, and he told them, they were convinced ; so they marched him down to Brigade Headquarters with fixed bayonets. That was our Yankee friend's first experience of this war ! !

*B.H.A.N.*

*September 23rd,* 1917. *Cuinchy Brickstacks.*

" Bingo " Baines came over to see us last Monday, but I was away visiting Ames in hospital. We have now got a new doctor, a Yankee, instead of our " McHaffey." He is not at all a bad kind of bloke and does not drawl over much either.

I think I wrote and told you that Dick Warren has been awarded the Military Cross for a very daring daylight patrol. He is a wonderfully plucky little cove ; in fact I don't think he knows what fear is.

The other day I rode over to see Ames at Béthune across country. There are a lot of ditches about here, and I was galloping all out and came to one of these. My steed dug in his toes and looked down, and I was the only one that crossed it ! " Shiny," who was riding with me, simply rocked with laughter !



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I am now going to have my tea before going down to the support line for Church. I never told you that we are now back in the trenches once again. They seem to be our home.

The short rest went like a dream ; all over before it began, and, my word, we did have fun. I have not enjoyed one of our former rests nearly so much as this last one. I wonder how anyone manages to exist in other regiments.

Our Church is in a dug-out which the Padre has fitted up very nicely. The sapping platoon made an altar and painted it white, and now the dug-out is a Church on Sundays and a reading hole on week days.

Later.

The service was very nice, but in a way most weird. "Archies" were firing a little way behind.

*M.K.N.*

*September 26th,* 1917. *Le Quesnoy.*

Thank you for the parcel containing chocolate and a book, *The Double Garden.* I like the essay on the dog too ; I read it at once.

I wonder if you know that Harry Spurge has died of wounds. I last saw him when we were in the Arras Sector, and he was Adjutant of the 5th Battalion. I simply can't believe that he has gone for ever. It is too sad ; another real friend gone. I can't write any more now.

*R.J.N.N.*

*October 22nd,* 1917. *Marles-les-Mines.*

Here I am back with the Regiment once more. We had quite a successful day on the 20th, for we missed the boat at Folkestone, very cunningly, and went over to see the 3rd Battalion at Dover. There, we saw many old friends, had lunch, and returned in time to catch the 2 p.m. boat, reaching Boulogne at 5 p.m.

The R.T.O. told us that the leave train left at 4.27 a.m., but we made up our minds that that was an impossible hour to go at ; we were far too old soldiers to be caught that way ! So we went up to Wimereux and saw Dr. Michael Foster, who gave us a jolly good dinner, and made me laugh a lot when I felt a bit depressed. We spent the night at the Hotel Folkestone, and left the next day at 10.57, a gentleman's hour, and did the journey very comfortably.

The Regiment is still resting, which came to us as rather a surprise.



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Well, I enjoyed my leave even more than my first, and I wish—but it is no good wishing. It was very nice to have Dick Warren to travel with. I have just come in from a topping ride with him.

*M.K.N.*

*November 2nd,* 1917. *Marles-les-Mines.*

I have been most awfully lazy while in rest here. I received a letter from you about a week ago.

I have almost forgotten those ten days of leave owing to greater things afoot. By the way, leave has been extended to 14 days now; isn't that sickening? However, I am very glad I got my leave, because I don't mind much what may come to pass in the future.

We are having an excellent time here; plenty of riding and fun. I am beginning to despair of this filthy business ever having an end; I think I feel more pessimistic than I have ever felt. Italy has bitched things so badly. Germany has had wonderful luck in her autumn campaigns; Belgium in '14, Serbia in '15, Rumania in '16, Russia and Italy in '17, while we and the French hold on like grim death, giving help to all the allies in turn. The situation is not convincing of victory for us; in theory we may be winning, but in practice we seem a long way off. The Boches, I suppose, realize that they cannot win against us, and so strike at our weaker allies; the result seems good as far as they are concerned.

Dr. Foster gave us dinner at Wimereux, on our way back from leave. We drank the King's health; it was the first time that I had ever done it, and I had not the foggiest idea what had to be done.

*R.J.N.N.*

*November 6th,* 1917. *Les Ciseaux.*

We left our billets at Marles-les-Mines this morning, and have just completed a 15 mile march, which was quite pleasant. It was very sad having to leave the happy area. We have almost finished our period of rest, and now, I suppose, we are to get some hard work.

The country has changed completely; the houses are bigger with two storeys, and the country very flat, and cut with small dykes.

I suppose Italy has let us in for another year of war, and some of the British from here will have to go and bolster up the poor "Grinders." It looks as if they ought to have known that a big offensive was being prepared against them.



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Either their Intelligence Service is very bad, or their Staff failed to organise a strong resistance. They have proved themselves to be good fighters, and it does seem to be a bit curious that they should have been so badly boosted about.

The Regiment is very strong now. I was looking at it on the march, and we now spread over quite half a mile of road. My platoon has not been so strong for the hell of a time.

On Saturday, "Shiny" Horley and I visited Bruay and went to the theatre there. It was quite the best show I've ever seen in France. That town is full of old memories of the happy rest in that area last May. Now winter is on us; mud and water reign supreme once more; discomfort begins afresh, the same as last winter all over again and, I suppose, next winter too. Eleven months ago I landed in this country; how much longer? We must not grouse because a grateful Government gives us 8/6 a day, and also passes a vote of thanks. The latter was a most thoughtful move on their part.

I hope you won't be air-raided again while in London. I wish the enemy would confine his attention to the war out here and leave England alone. I get the wind up when I see there has been a raid on London, and I know you are there.

*R.J.N.N.*

*November 9th*, 1917. *Le Nouveau Monde.*

The last three days have been spent in marching. On the first day, we marched through Lillers to Les Ciseaux. On the second day, we did another 15 miles and fetched up at a camp at Terdeghem, and yesterday we covered another 8 miles through Cassel to this spot.

I have had considerable trouble with my teeth since leave, and this is now the third day of continuous aching. I got the Doctor to yank one out, while I sat on a soap box perched on a midden outside the Aid Post. Unfortunately, it was the wrong tooth, though I could have sworn that it was the culprit. It was a perfectly good one, and must have been aching from reflex action. All the farm hands watched the operation and laughed like hell!! I rode over to a C.C.S. this afternoon where I was told there was a dentist, but there wasn't one there; so I have got to stomach another night of hell.

The country round here is rather pretty, and, close by, the village of Cassel lies perched on the top of a hill, from which you can see Kemmel, the Mont des Cats, and even the ruins of Ypres. Otherwise, it is as flat as Norfolk and more so.

This is a straggling sort of village—hardly a village—there are farms dotted about all over the place. The platoon billets are too far apart; it takes too long to get round.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*November 11th*, 1917. *Le Nouveau Monde.*

I think, when I last wrote, that I must have been rather unwell, what with inoculation and toothache, but since having the old molar out yesterday, I have felt very fit. I went in an ambulance with my kit to a C.C.S. at Poperinghe, some 30 miles away, intending to stay the night if the dentist could not see me. There was a dentist, who said, at first, that he could not deal with me because the 2nd Division was not in his Corps. By this time I was sitting in his chair, and I said that if he had toothache like mine, he would not care a damn what Corps he belonged to. He relented, and to my intense relief yanked the brute out.

I fear there is a lot to be done yet, and we have got to go through with it. As you say, the British have never, in the past, fought better than when the horizon was black, and I'm sure the Army is not going to let down those who have already been killed; and perhaps this generation is not much more decadent than the last two. I think one can become horribly depressed about nothing, but it does not last long.

I wonder if you saw that cartoon in *Punch* depicting the smartly dressed women "doing their bit to lose the war." I thought it was very good.

The future is pretty murky what with the winter and the rain. However, you never know!

*M.K.N.*

*November 15th*, 1917. *Winnizeele.*

We are still a great distance behind the line, doing little or nothing. But we can easily hear the distant roar of the guns; and at night, the whole sky is lit up with their flashes. I have heard a few bombardments in my time, and seen the effect at night, but never have I heard or seen anything like this at so great a distance. It is something colossal.

To pass to lighter subjects; I went to dinner with Colonel Holt, who commands a Flying Corps Wing at Poperinghe, two days ago. He sent a car for Brett and me. We had a wonderful dinner and an excellent rum punch to finish up with; then a glorious long drive home in an open car.

Yesterday, we got up at 3 a.m. and did a practice attack; in the evening we had a dinner in honour of Brett's birthday at Cassel, which is quite close.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*November 16th,* 1917. *Winnizeele.*

Please don't get the wind up on my account. We are miles behind the line and therefore out of it all. I am hastening to let you know that all is well. It looks as if they have forgotten us!

We have moved again, and the Regiment is now under canvas in the midst of oceans of mud, though the officers are very well off in comfortable billets.

Last Sunday I played my first game of Rugger against the 24th Royal Fusiliers. I did not understand much of what was going on, but rather enjoyed it all the same.

We have just had a great discussion on Christianity, and no one has come to a very sound conclusion. It strikes me that our religion, as we have been taught it in the past, has failed rather badly in this war. Why, for one thing, should the parsons be exempted from sharing the dangers of their flocks, and bigger flocks than they generally have at home in their churches?

*R.J.N.N.*

*November 18th,* 1917. *Winnizeele.*

I am feeling fearfully braced with life at the moment, because the odds are 5 to 1 on the I.E.F. (Italian Expeditionary Force) which, at least, means a change from trench warfare.

Now, I am coming on to the subject of Christmas dinners for the men of "B" Company this year. If we go and help the "Ice Creamos," there will be great difficulty in getting food, for there won't be any E.F. Canteens to buy from. The men are very keen to have pork which is very difficult to buy and also very expensive. Do you think that any could be got in tins from the Army and Navy? Then, they want sausages, cigarettes, and cigars for the Serjeants. The cost is going to be pooled among the officers of the Company.

I am very fit and muchly looking forward to the new kind of campaign, if we go.

*R.J.N.N.*

*November 22nd,* 1917. *Beaulencourt Huts.*

We have now come back into the shell-hole area, but as yet, are far behind the line. This country was in the hands of the Boches when I first went into the line. We passed several well-known places this afternoon, which was very interesting.



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The Italians seem to be in the soup now. Venice is pretty certain to fall, as the Austrians will probably push from the north, and cut them off again.

By the way, if anything should ever happen to me, I should like you to give my servant £10. His name is 18177 Pte. Smith, No. 6 Platoon, "B" Company.

*R.J.N.N.*

*November 26th,* 1917. *Lebucquière.*

We are now miles away from where I wrote to you the time before last. This is a very interesting part of the world to me as I have already fought over it in the early part of this year. We marched past a wood—Loupart—famous in the Regiment, in that we were to have attacked it on March 15th; the Boche obligingly retired from it the day before the attack. We, also, marched through Bapaume which must have been quite respectable before the war; the enemy did not leave a roof standing; destroyed everything wholesale everywhere. There are trees with their bark cut round at the roots, shrines desecrated and robbed of their images and crucifixes, in fact a picture of an abomination of desolation.

I had seen these villages burning, when the Boche first retired, and it was fearfully interesting to see them, and also our positions from the enemy's side of the line. We have marched through a good many more villages since then, and they are all the same, simply blown flat. It is heart-rending, because the country otherwise is untouched, except for rows of extremely thick wire here and there.

We are now under canvas which is pretty uncomfortable for the time of year. This afternoon I went for a ride with seven others across the rolling plains. It is rather extraordinary that this reconquered ground has not been cultivated again. Not a single plough has got to work.

The weather has turned bitterly cold and, once more, all my warm clothes are out and on me. Cold water in the early morning is simply cruel, especially as we have to wash outside.

At one time, we all thought we were going to be sent to Italy and were very excited about the prospect; and now we are in the land of desolation, where there are no civilians or signs of civilisation. But I am very glad we were not sent to Ypres. That front, from hearsay, is no place for human beings. Four miles of duckboards and death by drowning in the mud, threatens you if you fall off them.

Your letter to-day was most amusing and someone suggested that you had had to "stand-to" for a division with your battle bowler (steel helmet) and vanity bag (gas respirator) to repel a counter-attack.



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There have been three cases of tonsilitis among the officers of " D " Company, but I have escaped so far.

" Shiny " Horley will probably come and see you when he's on leave.

*M.K.N.* *Old British Front Line,*

*November 28th,* 1917. *Hermies.*

We are now in putrid little shelters, which can easily be recognised by their proverbial lack of cover. There are four of us in a little hole about 6 foot by 5, and we eat and sleep and have our being in it. The obvious result is, that the mess stuff gets kicked about, and it is almost impossible to keep mud out of the butter and jam. It is an exact repetition of the posts at Courcellette, last winter. This is our third night in this place. We marched here along shelled roads whose surface was covered with liquid mud up to one's ankles. It rained hard the whole morning, before we began the march, but luckily it stopped soon after we had moved off. The show seems to have been very successful by comparing the numbers of wounded to killed. We are some distance behind our line, but being on a ridge, can see our own front line being shelled to hell. I went up on a reconnaissance yesterday to within 200 yards of our front line ; though a good deal of muck was being hurled at the front line, nothing much fell on the south side of the Bapaume-Cambrai road, which was lucky for me.

*R.J.N.N.*

*November 28th,* 1917. *Hermies.*

" Shiny " is posting this in London when he arrives on leave. We are now in the Cambrai sector, but I can rely on you not to spread any news of the troops here. As far as is known at present, the Division is going to hold the ground gained in this last push. It has been an excellent show. All the trenches are in good condition and there are wonderful Boche dug-outs untouched.

I went up to reconnoitre the line this afternoon, and there was considerable shelling of the Bapaume-Cambrai road. We are now in the old British front line near the Canal du Nord, which was in course of construction when the war began. It is being used as a lorry route. There are only a few shelters in our present position and we four (Barnard, Windross, Shaw) are all crowded into one, where there is scarcely any room to stretch out.

Everybody is very fit and cheerful. This last affair must have poked a vertical gust up the Boches. I am very fit and will write again at greater length. " Shiny " is coming to see you and will tell you all the news there is.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*November 29th,* 1917. *Hermies.*

Just a line in case you may be anxious about me. I am fit and in the pink and proud to think that we have beaten the Boche at their own game, and beaten them worse than at any other time. The ground that we have gained is virgin, without shell-holes. The trenches are intact and there are splendid dug-outs and masses of wire. The whole affair shows a vast improvement in our mode of attack, generalship, and staff work. The ground, instead of being useful only from a sentimental point of view, is really valuable to us, which does not apply up north where everything is mud.

There is comparatively little mud here, and everything is in excellent condition. From where we are now, the spires and chimneys of Cambrai can be easily seen, which is most exhilarating.

I am fearfully bucked at the whole affair, because we are now beating the Boche, and this is the first outward and visible sign of it. It is obvious, at any rate it seems so, that the enemy will have to do another spring retirement, which will break his spirit altogether. He knows as well as we do, that no other front matters at all, providing we can beat him on this one, and he will have his work cut out to make any impression on us here. I can foresee the British Army marching home triumphantly at Christmas 1919! I have very little news. I am very well indeed, in fact I have not had a days sickness since I came out. A year ago to-day, you gave me my signet ring, and I have nearly 12 months service to my account.

Please don't feel anxious for me. I don't like to think of you worrying.

*R.J.N.N.*

*December 7th,* 1917. *Hermies.*

All is well with me. We have had rather a trying time for the last six days in the trenches in Kangaroo Alley—very cold. Just a note to let you know I am still alive. Billy Barnard was wounded, so I command "B" Company for the nonce.

Please thank Angela for the cake and tell her I will write to her soon. Good-bye and good night. I sincerely hope you are not so cold as we are. It's awful, but there's a war on!

Will write at greater length later. I am too weary to say more than this now. Cheerio, you priceless old thing.

Yours till asbestos burns.

P.S. Happy Christmas to you all.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*December* 11*th*, 1917. *Lebucquière.*

You seem to be very anxious about me, and I am sorry that I have been unable to put you out of the anxiety.

I will now try and tell you what happened. The 5th Brigade was, luckily for us, in reserve when the enemy attacked the Division. We woke up to the tune of a barrage which we could see plastering our front line. I said to myself, "now we are for it," and at noon the 52nd moved up to support either of the two Brigades in the front line, according as help was required.

We stayed at Lock 7 for some time and then orders were received for the Regiment to counter-attack the Sugar Factory on the Bapaume-Cambrai road. (As a matter of fact this factory had never been captured by the enemy, though it was being pasted to hell).

We moved forward again, soon after, into Hughes Support trench, which ran parallel to the Hindenburg Line. Here we remained from 5 p.m. till 2 a.m. The trench had been evacuated by some reserve troops of the 47th London Division, who had left their packs stacked high in the bays of the trench. We were packed like sardines, my platoon occupying half a traverse only. Some very heavy stuff was coming over at odd intervals, and one 8-inch shell laid out 20 men. As you know, you can hear these very heavy birds coming from a considerable distance; they seem to take ages to arrive, and there is always a second during their flight, when you know whether they are going to fall near or far from you. I heard this particular bird from afar, and felt relieved that he was going to plant himself away from us. Then I began to doubt my supposition; a second later, it was touch and go, and then I realised that it was probably going to blot me out. I lived through one agonising second of uncertainty. There was no way of escape; we could not dodge the brute, as we were far too cramped for space. With a tearing, rushing, mighty roar as of an express train screaming at top speed through an enclosed station, it crashed in the next bay from me, right in the middle of my platoon! I darted round the corner and found a shambles. It had fallen plumb in the centre of the trench, a magnificent shot from the enemy's point of view. Among the killed was Serjeant Archer, Platoon Serjeant of No. 7, and a damned good chap. The only man who escaped untouched of all the men in that bay, was sitting on the top of a pile of packs, at the foot of which the shell had landed. The packs were utterly destroyed and he was lifted off his perch but unhurt!



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As soon as it got dark, we collected some bits of men, put them in a sandbag, carried out the recognisable bodies over the top and dumped them in a shell hole, and Billy Barnard said the Lord's Prayer over their remains. I think it was probably the only prayer he knew for certain!

By 2 a.m. we were pretty hungry, as we had had nothing to eat since 7 a.m., but we moved forward again in the moonlight to Kangaroo Alley, a trench behind the Arras-Cambrai road. There was only desultory shelling at the time, and we were extraordinarily lucky in that respect.

We stayed in Kangaroo Alley till the evening of December 1st, when "B" Company went up to the front line for 48 hours. The trench was very shallow and broad, and the weather was excruciatingly cold, so much so that sentries could only watch on the fire step for half an hour. We were in the front line from the evening of the 1st till the evening of the 3rd, and had no casualties. Messages* came with annoying regularity whenever we sat down to a meal in the dug-out, to say that the enemy were massing for an attack. Thereupon, we all went to our battle stations and stood-to-arms, waiting and ready for him, but he never came; not that he would have got far if he had tried. By the time we had "stood down," our meal was naturally stone cold. On the nights of the 1st and 2nd there were bombing attacks on our left, made by the 6th Brigade to try and extricate a Company of the 13th Essex† which had been cut off at Lock 5 and Moeuvres and surrounded, when the Boche attacked on the 30th. This gallant handful of officers and men were still holding out

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* These messages came from the R.F.C. who spotted masses of infantry concentrating East of Moeuvres. It was not until later, after the line had been shortened on the night of the 6/7th December, that the R.F.C. took oblique photographs of the Bourlon Area which still showed concentrations at the same map references. Then it was discovered that the masses were German dead heaped so high as to cast a shadow on the negative! J.E.H.N.

† Cf. Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches, p. 166. "Somewhat later in the morning an attack in force . . . isolated a company of the 13th Essex Regiment in a trench just west of the canal. After maintaining a splendid and successful resistance throughout the day, at 4 p.m., this company held a council of war at which the two remaining company officers, the company serjeant major, and the platoon serjeants were present, and unanimously determined to fight to the last and have 'no surrender.' Two runners who were sent to notify this decision to Battalion H.Qrs. succeeded in getting through to our lines and delivered their message. During the remainder of the afternoon and far into the following night this gallant company were heard fighting, and there is little room for doubt that they carried out to a man their heroic resolution."



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in spite of their predicament, and were annoying the enemy with great success, by sniping over the parapet and parados. I am afraid the bombing attacks failed in both cases and the Essex had to surrender when their ammunition was exhausted.

We watched these attacks from our front line. It was very thrilling. We could see the shrapnel bursting over the enemy trenches, and the smaller flashes of flame from Mills bombs. The darkness, meanwhile, was continually lit up by Verey Lights which burst high in the frosty night and fell into the rolling clouds of smoke. They were rather grim firework displays.

We went back into support from the night of the 3rd till 2 a.m. on the 5th, when the front line was evacuated, and we were left as the front line for 48 hours. "A" and "B" Companies were in the front line, the former holding Lock 6, where Dick Warren was in command, while we held about 400 yards of Kangaroo Alley on the right. This was a very long stretch and meant posting one man in every other bay for battle stations.

We had a very quiet time until the morning of the 5th, when Fritz showed a lot of activity. We could see tin hats worming towards our line on the left, where there was a trench along the canal bank. At our end, this trench had been blocked and a bombing section posted under No. 8665 L/Cpl. Tilbury. We sent back this information to Headquarters, and Seale came up to see if he could get at them with his trench mortars. This he did, and discouraged the Boche a lot by lobbing over a few really good shots. However, early in the afternoon they started to creep forward again, and the bombing post was kept busy until at about 3 p.m. a whizzbang barrage came over. I was sitting in Company Headquarters with Billy Barnard when it opened. I rushed upstairs and along the trench to the right to get to my platoon area. The shelling was pretty hot, the damned things bursting first in front of me and then behind me, so that I expected to catch one all to myself in each bay. However, I reached my platoon safely and found the men "standing-to" in battle order. Scarcely had I sat down on the fire-step for a breather than an orderly popped his head round the corner of the trench and told me I was wanted at Company Headquarters as the Captain was hit. So back I had to go, running the gauntlet of the damned whizzbangs. I found Billy B sitting on the top step of the dug-out nursing his left knee. He had been hit by a piece of shrapnel. The stretcher-bearers were just contemplating the removal of his great bulk, when a man of the bombing post on the left reported that the enemy were in the trench. Billy B got up at once and hobbled down the trench towards the



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Canal, which was our only covered line of retreat and, incidentally, towards the post which had reported the entry of the enemy into our trench! As it happened, the lad who brought the message was not telling the truth, thank God! He was a bit windy, for the Corporal had only told him to tell Billy B that the enemy were massing in the trench immediately opposite his post.

Billy's departure left me in command of the Company to carry out a rearguard action and a retirement later. I was taken by surprise, and had the wind up badly that I should make a mess of it.

All the afternoon, rumours came round that the enemy were massing at different map references. One report stated that the Lock had been captured on our left. This came just after Billy was wounded and put the wind up me badly. Thank heaven, it was also false, but all the same it was most alarming.

We held this position until the evening of the 6th. A message from Regimental Headquarters reached me early in the afternoon stating the time at which we were to withdraw, and I issued all orders accordingly so that there should not be any confusion or noise. But 20 minutes before the time, the Boches attacked Lock 6 and got into it, so that "A" Company on my left, which was responsible for the Lock, was compelled to retire immediately.

I had had no idea what was happening, until a terrific explosion rent the air and bits of the Lock sailed through space. It had been mined by the Sappers and was to have been blown up by a time fuse after "A" Company had evacuated it, and when it was hoped there would be a big covey of Boches making themselves comfortable inside the Lockmaster's quarters.

A few minutes after the explosion, Dick Warren sauntered into my trench and told me that he had given the order to the Sappers to blow the mine, and that when it went up, there were about 20 of the enemy in it. So the covey was caught after all!

My left flank was now completely in the air, and the enemy was in a marvellous position to enfilade the whole length of my trench.

My original line of retreat down the Canal bed was now cut off, so I sent three platoons down a road running towards our rear led by Windross, the only other officer left in the Company. This road was completely exposed and liable to be swept by machine gun fire at any moment, and I had visions of heavy casualties. The enemy, however, did not fire and the platoons got away safely. By this time, the other two platoons were ready in the trench, so I sent one off and a minute later sent out the last platoon, and marched in



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the rear of the Company with my Headquarters. We got back quite safely without a single casualty, which was extremely lucky, considering how Fritz had plastered that road the night before.

The 2nd Division saved the whole of the ground won on November 20th in the Bourlon Wood-Moeuvres area by hanging on so long. There were six enemy Divisions against the 2nd, and the front line troops on November 30th inflicted such severe casualties that all the six German Divisions are now out of the line recuperating. The 52nd had none of the hard fighting or perhaps I should not be able to write this; the other two Brigades, the 6th and 99th, did marvellously well.

We came out of the line on the night of the 8th, and are now well back for a rest. We had the hell of a march back in pouring rain; the men were splendid and marched valiantly, considering that they had full marching order with packs.

I got into bed at 4.30 a.m., and remained unconscious till 4 p.m. I had had no sleep to speak of, owing to the cold and being continually woken up to read messages and write orders. I got into a kind of condition when sleep seemed immaterial to me and I never seemed to want it. I suppose, really, I must have been dead beat.

The responsibility of that rearguard was the worst part of it, and the knowledge that if I floated, one hundred men's lives would be on my head. I am now temporarily in command of "B" Company, but Giles will be back soon to take over.

I have been for two rides across this undulating country. You can gallop for miles, though there is always the danger of wire with which the ground is littered in places. I am glad to say the civilians have started ploughing up some of it, which gives you an outward and visible proof of the good that last winter's advance did to this area.

We are all very fit in spite of the cold, and I am glad to say I have not got any chilblains yet.

I am so glad you like "Shinio." He is an excellent chap, one of the best, and such good fun too. I expect he will tell you all there is to know.

Don't be anxious about me. I have done a year and there is no reason why I should not carry on for another.

*M.K.N.*

*December 13th*, 1917. *Lebucquière.*

The war is becoming pretty serious now, from all appearances. The enemy seems to have plenty of men, due to the



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splendid support to our side given by Russia! We do seem to back the wrong horse. I do wish that the capture of Jerusalem and the advance in Mesopotamia could make some difference; these side-shows use a great many men and make no material difference to the ultimate issue.

It was a pretty responsible job that the Regiment was given to carry out, because our guns had to be moved behind us and the new line was only partly dug in our rear. Luckily the enemy did not know how extremely thinly the front line was held, and did not attack. I held 400 yards with my Company, which meant posting one man in every other bay! "A" Company on my left, across the Canal, had a bit of a scrap with some Teutons, but they did not attack in force. We managed to retire behind our own front line without any casualties. We had a rather nasty warm time of it from the barrage which wounded Billy Barnard.

I am very much afraid we shall be in the line for Christmas.

*M.K.N.* *Kellett Trench,*

*December 16th, 1917.* *Hindenburg Line.*

I am on duty and have to stay awake till 1.30 a.m., and during this time visit the sentries on their lonely posts in the pitch black, frosty night. You would probably laugh if you saw me now, dressed up like "Old Bill" while the candles gutter in the draught that whistles down the dug-out steps.

This evening your pencil arrived; I have attached it to my whistle strap. It is a sweet little pencil, and I shall always keep it in my top breast pocket.

At this point the candle refused to remain in an upright position, and has fallen twice across the page. It damned nearly did it again then.

When I am on duty I always feel that I would give a fiver to be allowed to sleep; just because I know I can't, I suppose. It always takes me that way. I hope you are snoozing in bed, at this moment. A bed with sheets is an unheard-of luxury in these parts; such a thing does not exist. However, I am going down to the Transport to-morrow for 48 hours and a bath, and I shall have two heavenly nights in a flea-bag—far better than cold sheets. Sour grapes!!

There has been a lot of fighting on our left, these last few days, but I don't think the Deutsches got very far. Also, I see that Fritz has been making raids in the La Bassée sector,



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which looks rather ominous. Perhaps he will try to bump us there and get one back on us.

Poor " Shiny " will be back from leave to-morrow ; he got his at a very useful time ; when we were about to go through the mill.

Billy Barnard is at No. 8, Rouen. The shell that hit him blew my haversack to shreds ; it was lying on the fire-step, and it also tore my field service note book neatly in half. I am glad I was not inside my belt at the time !

It is now 12.20 a.m., and time that I visited the sentries, so I will shut down, wishing you a very happy Christmas. I expect that the day of peace and goodwill will be celebrated by an unholy strafe. But what is Christmas ? It's no different from any other day in these parts.

*B.H.A.N.* *Kellett Trench,*

*December 19th,* 1917. *Hermies.*

We are having very cold weather now. I have been at the Transport for the last two nights, and am going up the line again to-day. I have been quartered in a tent, and this morning my sponge and nail brush were frozen together. It's so cold that it positively hurts to do anything outside.

There is snow on the ground which has now frozen to ice, and the whole countryside looks very " Christmassy."

Yours till a hen lays a hard-boiled egg.

*R.J.N.N.* *Old British Front Line,*

*December 22nd,* 1917. *Hermies.*

What fun about the Sloley ploughing. I laughed like blazes over that. Thank you very much for your letter received to-night with rations, dated 17th. I am sorry I did not give a sufficiently detailed account of the fighting ; but you must remember that we did not see much of it on November 30th. The only details I can give of the slaughter that day were told to me by a machine gun officer on our left, whom I visited at " stand-to " one morning in the line. He had eight machine guns mounted on a mound in a re-entrant slightly behind the main front line. When the battle started, the barrage missed these sections who had a clear field of fire for 1,400 yards. They made excellent use of their guns, and were so situated that they caught the massed formations of the enemy



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in enfilade and mowed them down. The Germans never reached our front line, except at one point where there was some dead ground. These machine guns were firing all day until, finally, only four could fire at a time while the other four rested and cooled, because the water was boiling in their jackets. Altogether they fired 72,000 rounds !* The slaughter must have been terrific.

We are now in Brigade Support, and are pretty comfortable, but damned cold at nights, when the draught whistles through our little shelter. However, it is better than being in the front line. Perhaps you have heard of my preparations for a Christmas dinner here. We are going to have the hell of a time. "Shiny" is in excellent form, and told me all about his visit to the House and how he enjoyed it. Some fish has just come in which looks as if it had died of Bright's disease !

Windross and I have put a well-grate into this shelter, and it is most successful, though only made of wire-netting. The chimney is made of corrugated iron. I am writing this during dinner, which is very wrong. Rabbit has just appeared. I think it must have been blown up by a trench mortar ! Love to all.

*B.H.A.N.*

*December 27th,* 1917. *Haplincourt.*

I must tell you how the Christmas dinner went off. We all collected in our shack at 7.30, with a snow storm going on outside. It was devilish cold, and we were packed in like sardines, and every time the servants came to the entrance and parted the canvas curtain a drift of snow blew in ! At the other end there was a blazing fire of huge logs. The fireplace was made by us and was a roaring success.

The Colonel carved the chicken, or rather pulled it to pieces because, he said, he was not a married man. The plum pudding was excellent and came in in sheets of flame. Rum punch brought up the rear.

A rather funny thing happened which had not been prearranged ; the shack had been made when there was eighteen inches of frost on the ground, and when the soil thawed, a great lump of mud fell down the Colonel's neck, at which we all shouted and cried for a speech, which was not forthcoming.

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Cf. Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches, p. 167.
"One battery of eight machine guns fired 70,000 rounds of ammunition into ten successive waves of Germans. Long lines of attacking infantry were caught by our machine guns in enfilade and were shot down in line as they advanced."



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After dinner, we had the tables and trestles taken out and had a rough house in the dark as all our candles had been expended by that time. The Colonel and "Twitt" had a good scrap.

We are now out of the line, thank heaven. But it has been almost impossible to sleep owing to the cold.

*R.J.N.N.* *Old British Front Line,*

*December 27th,* 1917. *Hermies.*

We are now resting for a few days. We had a very quiet time in the line, which helped us to bear the cold. "B" Company was in reserve for Christmas Day. We had a service in the Regimental Headquarters dug-out. It was a rather curious surrounding, but all the same it was nice to be able to sing the dear old Christmas hymns. We were very cramped for room, and had to kneel under the table for Holy Communion. At breakfast, the five officers of "B" Company drank to the health of their "old men," i.e. Fathers, in tea!! It was too early for port. Then we gave a dinner party in our shack which had a corrugated iron roof and an open fire-place burning great logs, cleverly scrounged! It was a great success; the Colonel, Hutchence the leech, "Shiny" Horley, "Twitt" Drake, and Dick Warren were our guests. We had one bottle of fizz between ten of us! Just enough to take the grease out of our mugs.

Yours till concrete becomes abstract.

*R.J.N.N.*

*December 29th,* 1917. *Barastre Huts.*

To-day I received my trench boots, and also that Shakespeare which I am charmed with. I looked up Act IV, Scene 3 of *Henry V,* and the famous passage before Agincourt. I love that passage. It is a priceless book to have out here.

I am hoping to get Paris leave again soon. Could you come over and meet me somewhere? I don't think I shall be able to get it till the end of January, because I am going on a course with my platoon to the Third Army School at Warloy, which may mean three weeks away from the Regiment, and the course begins on January 5th. This is the first course that I shall have been on for a year.

The men kept their Christmas yesterday, and had a right royal feast on pork, beef, ham and fresh vegetables. There was a snow storm in the evening, and the ground is now six inches under snow. It makes everything look so fine and sparkling, and covers up the tortures of war indiscriminately. As you know, we are now out of the line—maybe for some time. The Division has done very well this tour, and has made another



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name for itself.

A happy Christmas to you all.

*M.K.N.*

*December 29th,* 1917. *Haplincourt.*

We had a very quiet time in the line; but I had a very narrow escape. There was a particular trench junction on our front which the Boche shelled at five minutes to every hour. I was making my way back to call my relief, and reached the trench junction at 10.50 p.m. Just as I reached it, an orderly came up leading a party of Sappers, commanded by an officer, who said he had come to put out wire on our front. I forgot all about the time in my amazement at seeing Sappers in the front line, let alone going to do a job of work in No Man's Land. The officer wanted to know where the wire was to be put out, and I hadn't the foggiest idea. We were discussing it, standing at the trench junction, facing the parapet, when, suddenly there was a terrific explosion and a sheet of flame seemed to envelope me. The next thing that I knew, was that I was sprawling full length on the ground, just clear of the pieces of frozen earth that were falling all round. I felt myself all over, thinking I must be dead, picked up my tin hat and ran round the corner. There was not a graze on me. The explosion came from a whizzbang, which burst on the parados immediately behind my head. I saw the shell crater, the next morning. How it missed my head, Heaven only knows. Of course I never heard it coming; you never do hear the one that hits you. That shell must have arrived punctually at 10.55!

My escape was almost as miraculous as the sight of a Sapper wiring party!

There is six inches of snow on the ground, and a bitter, frosty wind, which freezes everything, including boots, in these huts.

*R.J.N.N.*

*December 31st,* 1917. *Barastre Huts.*

I feel that I must write to you on this, the last day of the old year. It has been a very lucky year for me. I hope next year will be the same, and this time next year, I shall be entitled to one month's leave!! Let's hope the war will be over by then.

However, I see by the papers that we have got to face 750,000 more Teutons on this front, which will probably mean that we shall be on the defensive, unless the Americans can



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step in and equalise a bit. Dick Warren has gone to Hospital with a poisoned thumb, caused by a piece of splinter when the Boche attacked Lock 6. However, it is not serious. A little bird has told me that he has been recommended for a bar to his M.C., and I hope he will get it with all my heart, for he put up a damned good show before the Sappers blew up that Lock.

Yesterday the Teutons made an attack, a good way away from our front, but we were put on one hour's notice to move. This lasted the whole afternoon, and we actually had orders to move up in support, but these were luckily cancelled.

I am in command of the Company again, Giles being away on a course. I thought I had been let in again for another strafe of some calibre, which might have meant making a counter-attack. I get the wind up badly on these occasions!

I saw that H.M.S. *Pellew* had had some casualties. I am so glad Ben Peeke got out of it all right.

*R.J.N.N.* *3rd Army Musketry School,*
*January 6th,* 1918. *Warloy.*

You will be sorry to hear that Dick Warren has gone to England. His thumb got much worse, and so he was sent home. The bombing he mentions in his letter is done on our rest billets just behind the line. The Boche has become a damned nuisance in that respect. Whenever there is a moon, he comes over and bombs our camps, and makes some good shots now and again. As you see, I have changed my address for the first time for a year. I am here with my platoon on a company course of musketry, which tends to be amusing in that we have "blood on the bullet and bayonet" drilled into us by chaps who have never heard a shot fired in anger.

I only arrived last night, and found that nothing had been arranged, and all the men's blankets had been lost. I, myself, had no billet, but was taken in by a kind captain on the staff of this place. I have a lovely bed and blankets, and was thoroughly warm for about the first time since this cold weather started. We are fairly close to Amiens here, and I am going to try to get there next Saturday or Sunday. I knew this place this time last year, and it has altered considerably since then. It used to swarm with resting troops and lorries, but now it is quite deserted.

The Colonel and "Shiny" Horley have gone down to Rouen to see Billy Barnard who is still in hospital there. Apparently his wound proved to be worse than was originally thought.

George Field who used to command "B" Company in the Béthune days, has come back from his Senior Officers' Course, and has taken over the Company again.



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By the way, I sent you a New Year's card of the Church we had in the trenches at Cambrin. It was called St. Peter's, Wimpole Street, which was the name of the trench it had been dug in.

Your letter of the 29th was most awfully kind, but you make me out to be a hero which is far from being true. Perhaps you saw that "Tiger" Wyld has got a D.S.O. in the New Year's Honours which is jolly good work. It is extraordinary to think that he is only 22.

*M.K.N.* *3rd Army Musketry School,*

*January 6th,* 1918. *Warloy.*

You can see by my address that I have left home! How we shall be able to do any musketry, heaven alone knows; for it means a lot of standing about, and nowadays that is a low-down trick to play on any man. The cold is intense, and just as bad as last year. It is bad luck that we should have two severe winters. I like a little frost to keep the mud down, but the snow has been lying since December 23rd. I am in a billet with a bed, for the first time since November 20th, which is a great treat as you can imagine. All the same, I far prefer the floor of a Nissen hut with the Regiment, to a feather bed away from it.

The journey to this village was very interesting; we passed over the old No Man's Land of the Somme. It is more shell-holed than any that I have seen since we were at Courcellette last year. Of course I cannot compare it with Ypres, as I have never been there. But there is no surface at all; it is one huge shell-hole knocked to pieces by other shell-holes, if you follow me.

Dick Warren has been evacuated to England. The Doctor said that, probably, a splinter hit him when Lock 6 was blown up. Of the bunch that came out with me, three have been killed, two wounded, and two have gone sick.

There is a priceless pantomime running in Bapaume, in one of the only houses left with four walls.

*R.J.N.N.* *3rd Army Musketry School,*

*January 13th,* 1918. *Warloy.*

Letters of congratulations have been pouring in lately, redirected from the Regiment. I shall be up to my eyes trying to answer them all. I am more glad than I can say that you should be so pleased about it. You must remember that it is only the M.C.; I might have got the V.C. by your letters!! You may well ask what I got it for, because I'm blowed if



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I know. Nowadays it signifies nothing, considering that bakers at Rouen get it.

I have just returned from Amiens where I spent one night. I had awful good luck in meeting "Bingo" Baines and Ben Slocock and another of "ours." We had a priceless lunch at the Café Gobert.

I don't think there is any foundation to the rumour that the Boches came over in British uniforms in the last attack. We are all warned against these ruses, and great care is taken in challenging. They came over the other day in white smocks and gave some trouble then.

I go back to the Regiment next Friday, I think. The Colonel has got a bar to his D.S.O. Isn't it grand?

*R.J.N.N.* *3rd Army Musketry School,*

*January 16th,* 1918. *Warloy.*

I think you had better stand fast about Paris at present, until I can find out how I stand for English leave. I shall be going back to the Regiment in a day or two. If it is likely that I shall not get English leave till the middle of February I shall put in for six days in Paris, which does not affect the English leave. I will write and tell you at once if I apply.

I am not at all sorry that this course is nearly over. I am getting fed up with the monotony of it, and the Commandant is always finding fault with something. There is a whole company from the 5th Brigade, one platoon from each regiment, and as I am the only lieutenant amoung the officers, I was put in command of the composite company. It's hard enough to command a company of "ours," let alone a mixture of four regiments.

The weather has become perfectly awful; torrents of rain flood this wretched plain. I think I prefer the intense cold to this everlasting downpour which turns everything into a quagmire. At any rate, the cold weather is not so depressing as the wet.

I'm rather bucked about the increase in the rates of pay. I shall be earning quite a lot per year now, and it is a good thing that there is not such a wide gap between a lieutenant and a captain.

*B.H.A.N.* *Wood Avenue,*

*January 26th,* 1918. *Welsh Ridge.*

I spent last Monday night, the 12th, with "Bingo" Baines in Amiens. He had been up to see us at Beaulencourt, where we were resting. He had to leave at 6 a.m. on Tuesday, and



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I was left with nothing whatever to do. My train started at 6 p.m., and after changing twice, I was dumped at a place four miles away from the light railway, which was my only means of reaching the Regiment that night. It was raining like stink, but I walked four miles along the railway to arrive just after the last light train had gone up the line. It was then 3.30 a.m., and so I got down to it in a Y.M.C.A. hut till 7.30 a.m., when I got a train. I eventually found the Regiment after many wanderings at 10.15 a.m. The Regiment was then in reserve but now we are in the front line again in a "n'orrible" position, with mud up to our eyelids. However, it has been pretty quiet up till now, but it is very uncomfortable and quite as bad as this time last year.

*M.K.N.* *Welsh Ridge,*

*January 27th,* 1918. *Villers Plouich.*

As yet the Boche has not bumped us (as the Americans say) in this god-damned place. We are in the front line, once more, and the conditions are far from being pleasant. There was sticky mud up to our thighs when we came in, but, as it has not rained lately, we have managed to get rid of some of it. There was some heavy fighting here in December, and out of the mud we have salved many things, from dead men to Lewis guns complete, besides rifles and much equipment. It is a foul position to hold, because, being the apex of a triangular salient, the Boche can enfilade us from three sides, while our own machine guns fire from behind. The sparks that fly from the stream of bullets would be a credit to a firework display. The trenches are very shallow, and we can only progress along the old firestep, for the mud in the trench itself is glutinous to a degree. We can only go the rounds of the sentry posts at night, and then the machine gun fire is almost incessant. I asked Brett why we held such a filthy position, and his answer was that it was a piece of France. The French are welcome to this piece! It's no fun being shot at from three sides. However, there is nothing to grouse about up till the moment of going to press.

I have to thank you for your letter written after your return to Boreham. Now you can realise what it is like to come back to France after leave. There is a sort of hopeless feeling for about two days, isn't there?

I do not like your last sentence about superfluous women and gunmeat. It literally makes me shudder. Really, there is little that keeps the troops at this tragic farce of a war so much as the knowledge that they are keeping the enemy from their women folk. It does not seem that we can gain much by going on, but we shall lose everything if we stop now.



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I heard of a rather good remark not long ago; an eminent Colonial said that he was for peace at any price. Everyone was astounded, until he added "and the price is—War." One can only hope and go on hoping, but even that comes rather hard sometimes, doesn't it?

*B.H.A.N.*

*January 30th*, 1918. *Metz-en-Couture.*

We are out of the trenches again. We had the same sort of time as we did this time last year, wallowing through mud up to our thighs, and in some ways, it was worse because the Boches fired machine guns all the time and swept the parapet. A man in my platoon (Pte. Passey) was wounded in the back when facing the enemy!

We had one officer killed, such a damned good chap as usual, Barclay by name. He was killed by a machine gun bullet, which took the guts out of him, while he was going round the posts over the top. It was the only way to go, because the trench was so deep in mud that to walk along it was impossible.

We went to his funeral at Fins yesterday. It was very simple and short, and the poor chap was carried down on a stretcher wrapped in a blanket. It was most impressive.

It seems incredible that we shall never see his cheery face again. Anyway, he is out of the trenches for a long rest now.

*R.J.N.N.* *Riley Avenue,*

*February 7th*, 1918. *La Vacquerie Sector.*

I was so pleased to get a letter from you after a pretty long spell without one. The mails have been very irregular lately at this end; sometimes nothing for about four days, and then a rush of them.

I am so glad you liked the Colonel. I thought his inaudibility would strike you. Sometimes he talks almost in a whisper, but it all depends on how he is feeling and what sort of a mood he is in. I simply worship him, not only for his marvellous soldierly qualities, but also for his personality, keenness and influence. It is extraordinary how you can tell at once when he is away from the Regiment; it's not quite the same without him.

What a narrow escape the Brentford Gas Works had! Jolly good luck that the Boches only did that amount of damage. I suppose one incendiary bomb would have blown the whole works to hell.



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We are in the trenches again in a pretty quiet part of the line where the Boches are quite a long way away from us. We came up on the night of the 3rd. "B" Company was in reserve for the first 48 hours, in Nissen huts beside Village Road which runs at right angles to our line across No Man's Land to the enemy line. These blinking huts are painfully exposed and nowhere near splinter proof. I did not feel at all comfortable in them and would have preferred a trench, for in any strafe the enemy would be bound to shell the road. The strafe came, just as I anticipated, at "stand-to" on the 5th. A 5.9 shell landed on Company Headquarters. The result was a filthy sight. The hut was a shambles. Corporal Marsh and Pte. Brooks were blown to atoms, and Serjeant Groves, Lewis Gun Serjeant, though intact in body, was as blue-black as a live lobster. The officers' hut escaped, but I liked occupying it still less after that episode. The only man to escape out of the Company Headquarters personnel was the Company Serjeant-Major, Smith by name, who had just gone out to "stand-to" with the troops.

William Giles is going back to England for six months rest, and well he deserves it. I am very sorry he is going, because he and I have been together the whole time during my sojourn out here. However, for his sake I am very glad indeed. He is badly run down, and a rest will do him a world of good. There is only one other subaltern still serving with the 52nd who has been out longer than I, and one the same time. So I am becoming quite an old soldier.

I have heard nothing definite about my leave.

*R.J.N.N.*

*February 10th*, 1918. *Metz-en-Couture.*

We are just out of the line (La Vacquerie Sector), I am feeling fearfully braced with life and you can guess why.

The 6th Battalion has been disbanded, and we have got their band and eight officers and 150 other ranks. Brigades are now composed of three battalions instead of four, and the 6th was disbanded from the 20th Light Division.

We had a long, but quiet time in the line, a very interesting part of the line too, from every point of view.

No more now. I hope to tell you personally all my news.

*March 9th*, 1918. *Ostrich Lane.*

The journey back was pretty frightful, but I am thankful to be with the Regiment again. If one has got to be in this ruddy country it is better to get back to the Regiment as



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quick as possible : I am miserable away from it, and travelling alone back from leave is not an exhilarating experience.

I left Boulogne at 12 and reached Buire at 7.30 p.m. There I had to detrain. It was raining like hell and dark as pitch, and in stepping down from the high carriage, I missed the second step and fell flat into the mud at the siding. I had a stick and a saxhorn in my hand and they went for six. The bugle was safely stowed in my pack. As a result of my collapse, I broke my new wrist watch. I have no luck with watches. I waited in a hut at the siding for the next train to take me to Ytres. Luckily there was a roaring brazier and some food to be had, and I was able to dry my clothes a bit. The next ammunition train only took me as far as Plateau where I had to detrain again and seek shelter from the rain and cold. I eventually reached Ytres in a cattle truck at 3.30 a.m. and stayed the remainder of the night in a Y.M.C.A. hut. I should have passed out from sheer misery and loneliness if it had not been for the chap in charge. In spite of the hour, he found me some blankets and I slept till 7.30 a.m. What a contrast after 14 days leave !

I set off on Tuesday (5th) at 9 a.m. and reached the Transport Lines at 11 a.m. and from there, I rode over to the Regiment at Metz-en-Couture, taking the saxhorn and bugle with me. The Colonel was most frightfully pleased with the latter. His face was wreathed in smiles when I handed it over to him.

We paraded at 5 p.m. for the trenches on Welsh Ridge. I am commanding " B " Company as Field is on special leave. It is a new area to me. We seem to chop and change a lot in this sector.

The trenches, such as there are, are knee deep in mud and so shallow that a cock louse would be exposed crawling in them. My size is a great disadvantage in these sort of places.

We hold a thin outpost line consisting of posts every fifty yards, between which there is no covered communication. Yesterday afternoon I got badly potted at when visiting these posts. The trench, Ostrich Lane, from Company H.Qrs. to Ostrich Post is dry though shallow. In going from the latter to the next post on the left, I floundered through mud with bent back, sweating and fuming. It was like trying to walk in treacle, and I could get no leverage for my legs which were held in a gripping suction. I thought I would risk it, and stand up straight and force my way through with all my strength. Hardly had I straightened my back when I heard the ominous pop-pop-pop of a " pineaple " mortar. I had to make up my mind whether to try and run for shelter through the mud or lie face down in it. I struggled forward as best I could



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until I heard the swishing of the bombs in the air. Then I buried my person in the mud! It was an agonising minute that I lived through. The first bomb burst in the trench fifteen yards ahead of me, showering mud over the back of my neck: the next burst behind me and thereafter all round me on the parapet and parados. I expected at every moment to have one flash of realization when one landed in the small of my back, and then extinction! I did not count the bombs, but I reckoned they fired fifteen at me. I lay doggo for about five minutes and then wormed my way along to the post. Serjeant Smith was rather concerned, as the sentry had seen me leave Ostrich Post.

I took no chances coming back! This may give you some idea of the position we are in.

Three days ago we were warned to do a raid to get an identification and, I suppose, a confirmation of the date of the impending Boche offensive. It will be over by the time you get this and I will write details later.

*B.H.A.N.*

*March 12th,* 1918. *Highland Trench.*

The Regiment is now out of the front line. We were told to expect the Boche to breakfast on the 10th. We had a splendid hot one waiting for him and his tanks which were to have come too. However, he never came to call.

"B" Company made a raid last Saturday morning at 4 a.m., which was unsuccessful. We were told to get an identification because the Staff want to know when the Boche attack is to be launched. The cutting of the wire was left to the 6-in. Stokes Mortar Battery which is manned by gunners. They made a frightful hash of it. I watched the shoot from my Company Headquarters. The first round sailed well over into the Boche support line, and the second seemed to be an excellent shot into the enemy's wire. They had found the range.

The Colonel warned me that they would cut wire early in the afternoon. They started the job just as the light trench mortars were making their emplacements in Ostrich Post. The latter were going to co-operate in the box barrage at zero. I watched the shoot again, and to my horror I saw the third bomb fall straight into Ostrich Post. The result was a shambles and poor Seale (52nd attached to the Light Trench Mortar Battery) was among the killed.

I telephoned to Regimental Headquarters and asked the Colonel to stop the 6-inch Stokes firing. The latter reported to him that it could not possibly have been their shell which had fallen into my post. That is the stock reply of gunners



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when they are accused of firing short. So after we had cleared up the mess in Ostrich Post and I had a message to say that the damned 6-inch Stokes were going to try again, I asked the Colonel if a gunner officer might be detailed to observe the shoot and, at the same time, I withdrew the forward posts out of harm's way.

Just before the shoot began, a gunner officer arrived. We stood up on the fire step outside Company Headquarters and waited. The first bomb sailed over into Bocheland and the officer turned to me and said, "There, you see; that is the range we were firing at before." The next one just cleared our front line parapet, and landed with a crash in our own wire.

"What about that one?" said I.

"That is the bracket," he replied.

I heard the pop of discharge of the third, and turned round to watch it sailing through the air. To me it was not at all obvious where the infernal thing was going to land until the last second of its flight, when I called to the gunner to dive for the dug-out. It landed just behind the parados! approximately 150 yards from the front line.

After that exhibition, the gunner hopped it back to his mortars and did not stop to argue. The standard answer of the "bracket," which is supposed to mystify us poor ignorant infantrymen, was proved to be futile.

The net result of it was that the Colonel requested that the wire-cutting should be left in the hands of the Field Gunners. The men in the posts were rather shaken, and as they had to do the raid, we came to the conclusion that it was better to risk uncut wire than have them still further shattered by our own mortars.

Luckily, I was commanding the Company, Field being on leave; otherwise I should have had to lead it, as it was my turn.

Pluckrose led the party, and was wounded slightly by a bomb in the leg. It was the same old story. They never reached the Boche trench because of uncut wire, which was a pity because the Boche post, our objective, was full of men and apparently unprepared.

*R.J.N.N.*

*March 13th*, 1918. *Highland Trench.*

Last night I got your two letters, one written at Folkestone while waiting for the boat, and the other somewhere in this bloody land of misery and desolation. I am so sorry you cannot manage to get down this way; it is far the most interesting of all the fronts up-to-date from a tourist's point of



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view. I thought of asking the Colonel if he could find out where you would be likely to be, but, on consideration, it would not be fair to ask to go, and thereby leave George Field all alone with the Company.

There is colossal wind up all along this front that the Boche is going to attack us with tanks. He bombarded all last night with gas shells from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., and our guns, thinking it was a preliminary barrage, opened up too. The result was a terrific artillery duel all night.

We stood-to-arms and manned our battle positions, but I managed to get some sleep between 4.30 and 5.45 a.m., in spite of the barrage. I dreamed that I was on leave and coming back in a taxi, when I noticed, while passing Buckingham Palace, that it had been shelled to glory. The whole of London was being shelled. I ran down Buckingham Palace Road with all the familiar buildings in ruins. It was a truly awful dream and pray God, it will never, never come true. I woke up feeling very cold and cheerless, and wrapped myself in a blanket to await the dawn, and the supposed Boche attack. It was a lovely dawn, but just as it was getting light, the Huns put down a 5.9 barrage on our left and I thought that that meant something doing. Nothing happened, and we have another reprieve. These are anxious days for the fighting troops, I can tell you.

The 52nd is now in support to the front line battalion. We are on the top of Highland Ridge, in a very fine position. " Der Tag " is coming and coming soon, but no one knows exactly when ; the waiting for the inevitable is absolute hell.

*M.K.N.* *Diarmid Trench,*

*March, 14th,* 1918. *Villers Plouich.*

Wind is vertical in expectation of an attack. We " stand-to " all night and sleep in the mornings from 7 to 1 p.m. In the last few days, this front has become very lively ; the Boche strafes with gas all night long, and occasionally sends over hurricane bombardments, making the night perfectly hideous. You cannot see what is happening, and with it all, there is this constant stream of gas, which never seems quite strong enough to make a respirator necessary, but is strong enough to catch your throat. The nights are spent digging trenches that I feel certain will never be occupied, and if they are, I am sorry for the occupants, because they are about seven feet wide and three feet deep, and perfectly useless at the moment. It will take another month to complete the whole system properly.



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*B.H.A.N.* *Highland Trench,*

*March 15th,* 1918 *Villers Plouich.*

I heard a story from an officer at Boulogne who went to the War Office and asked for four days extension of leave on urgent private affairs. They asked, "What are they?" and he replied: "They would not be private if I told you," and he got his four days!!

This sector has become unpleasantly lively, and there is colossal wind up that Fritz is going to offend here. We stand-to-arms all night, and man battle positions, waiting for him. He has started sending over "crashes" on to certain targets, and you never know what the target is going to be, because he alters it every night.

He has also copied our stunt of hurricane bombardments at night, and pumps gas shells at us from sundown to sunrise. So, you see, the war is not a bed of roses in these parts.

The Regiment has had 50 casualties from gas in the last three nights. Last night was pretty quiet for us, but there were continuous bombardments on our right and left.

The Regiment is in support now, and the result is that we get the gas; the front line battalion does not. All the same, I am happier here than in the front line. It's a terribly anxious time, and the front line is no place for a gentleman! If Fritz attacks, the front line companies will be simply mopped up, for it is impossible to hold the front with the number of men we have these days.

This must be all. I have had three and a half hours sleep since yesterday morning, and I am feeling rather drowsy.

*B.H.A.N.*

*March 19th,* 1918 *Winchester Valley.*

The weather has broken to-day. It was simply heavenly yesterday, and I donned shorts and lay out and listened to the band in the afternoon.

I am not feeling fearfully fit to-day; rumours of earache in my left ear, and also signs of a touch of gas which makes one feel rather rotten. It's the enemy's new kind; nothing dangerous; it just affects one's voice. I am losing mine and the whole of No. 6 Platoon is dumb! It gives one a sore throat, cough, and diarrhoea, but it all passes off. The gas does not take effect until forty-eight hours after getting a whiff of it. That is the curse of it; one can't tell whether one has got a dose or not. I shall be all right to-morrow.

It is now raining for the first time for a fortnight. Up till now it has been summer weather.



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*Diary.*

*March 20th,* 1918.

The 52nd is due to be relieved to-day by the 47th London Division, which has been resting at Rocquigny, for the past month. We are now rather split up; "C" Company is still in support to the 24th Royal Fusiliers in Diarmid Trench, which runs along the crest of Highland Ridge, commanding the Ribecourt-Villers Plouich Valley; "B" and "D" companies are in Winchester Valley, just in front of Metz-en-Couture; "A" and Regimental Headquarters are behind Mets on the Fins road.

Later.

The 8th London Regiment (Post Office Rifles) came up before they were expected, by light railway from Rocquigny. "B" Company took the train back to Ytres, where the 52nd took over an excellent Nissen hut camp from the London Irish. Their pipers gave us a welcome, and played very well. It seems to be a smart regiment, for the camp was left clean and tidy for us.

We are due to rest here for a month.

*M.K.N.* *Vallulart Camp.*

*March 21st,* 1918 *Ytres.*

This morning, at 4.45, a terrific barrage opened. The Boche offensive has come evidently. The Regiment was ordered to "stand-to" at once. It was devilish dark and cold getting out of a warm flea-bag. We are still "standing-to" now waiting for any eventualities, on 20 minutes notice to move. We were only relieved yesterday; the 47th London Division relieved the 2nd, and we form the Divisional reserve. We shall probably be pushed into the thick of it again. Our Divisional rest will consist of counter-attacking and holding the line. All the same, I am damned glad we are not in the line at this moment. We should have had a six and a half hours' bombardment by now.

The barrage fire is something terrific. You cannot hear any ordinary noise, such as a lorry passing, and yet, we are a long way behind the line.

We are in a rather good camp, but for how long, God knows. The strain of the last few weeks in this area has been greater than in any or all the other areas that I've been in. We have been waiting and expecting this to happen every day for weeks.

We have got tons of wire put up, all over the countryside, and rows and rows of half-dug trenches. I've never seen such systems of wire before.



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Our Brigade rests of six days have been spent on working parties digging vast trenches under the supervision of a sapper corporal, who has walked round with an "A" frame in his hand to see that the dimensions of the trench are absolutely correct. This has been going on for the last two months. Then, every night, we have been bombed by aeroplanes, so that the troops have preferred the front line to reserve, for there, there are no Sappers to see that our trench complies with the "A" frame, and the aeroplanes leave us alone! Now, what we have been waiting for and preparing for, has come, and I expect we shall be called up at any moment.

*Diary.*

*March 21st,* 1918

At 4.45 a.m. a heavy barrage opened, and "rubber heel" shells started falling in Ytres. The order came to "stand-to." We had to dress in the dark, and prepare for action. The morning was very cold and foggy, while, in the distance, the barrage rolled like the beating of a mighty drum. I have never heard such a barrage. The chief bombardment seemed to be just on the flanks of the 5th Corps, at Bullecourt and Gonnelieu. We "stood-to" all day, waiting for news, very little of which came through. We heard that the 4th Corps on the left was heavily engaged, but that the 51st Highland Division was dealing successfully with the enemy. The 5th Corps' front had also been attacked, but the 47th Division had lost only one post on Welsh Ridge. The whole Division, however, had been compelled to retire to Highland Ridge to conform with the 7th Corps of the 5th Army. The news from the latter was not so encouraging; the 7th Corps had been pushed back 2½ miles.

This was the sum total of news that came through. The 52nd remained at 20 minutes notice to move, until late at night, when it was increased to one hour.

The fog came down again at dusk; enemy aeroplanes bombed us at night, too close to be pleasant.

*Diary.*

*March 22nd,* 1918

The Regiment slept fully clothed, in case a sudden move was ordered. Orders came at 3. a.m. to be ready to move at 4.30 a.m., first line transport included.

We formed up on the Ytres road in order, "C," "D," "B," "A" Companies, and marched via Bus to Vimiera Camp at Barastre. The barrage was still very intense, and, moreover, 15-inch shells were falling in Bus and Barastre!



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It was a bitterly cold and foggy morning, and the march was made fatiguing by the continual checks and halts, owing to bad roads and the flow of transport in all directions, which blocked a passage.

We took over the huts of the 19th Division, which had been ordered forward last night to counter-attack. The men settled in at about 6.30 a.m.; but sleep was practically impossible owing to the terrific bombardment which was raging between Bullecourt and Hermies.

The fog lifted at midday and it became quite hot. We lay out in the sun, waiting for orders for the Brigade's immediate movement into action. At 1.30 p.m. the Colonel went forward to Bertincourt, to report to the G.O.C. 17th Division.

Meanwhile, the 52nd paraded under Brett, and marched off across country to the sound of the guns, in artillery formation. Enemy aeroplanes buzzed round overhead, apparently complete masters of the air. The 74th advanced on our left, and came under heavy shell fire, as soon as they were spotted by the enemy 'planes.

The Colonel returned at 4 p.m., and called for a conference of all officers. The news seemed serious, but not critical; the 17th Division had been able to hold the enemy, but the junction between them and the 51st Division was very weak, and the reserve regiment of the left Brigade of the 17th Division had been sent up to reinforce the line. The 52nd was likewise to support the weak spot.

Such was the news.

The 52nd moved off immediately with companies in artillery formation and platoons at 100 yards distance. The route took us across country, and all possible use of dead ground was made in order to avoid detection by hostile observation balloons, with which the sky was dotted all along the front for miles.

At sunset, the 52nd took up a position behind Hermies with the 74th on the left. The night was very cold, and a bright moon and frost made visibility good. There was not much shelling, so that we were able to dig in and make ourselves as comfortable as possible unmolested.

*Diary.*

*March 23rd,* 1918.

At 7 a.m. we had orders to get ready to move back, and I was sent on ahead to meet the Commanding Officer at the Green Line—an imaginary line which ran behind Bertincourt —to get orders from him as to the position to be held by "B" Company. I started off immediately with my servant,



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down the Hermies-Bertincourt road. The sunrise was perfectly glorious, and, it seemed another hot day lay ahead of us. Fuller represented "C," Eagle 'D," and Colvill "A" Companies. The Commanding Officer met us at 8 a.m. and gave us the following information and orders:—

"Bad break in 7th Corps on our right; enemy in Beaumetz and possibly Hermies.

The 5th Brigade is to hold a switch of the Green Line from where it meets the railway about P.2 b.3.1., on the right to O.11. b.9.6. on the left, where it joins with the 6th Brigade.

The 63rd Royal Naval Division will be on our right, holding from P.2. b.3.1. southwards towards main Green Line and facing east. The 52nd front is from P.2. b.3.1. to P.1 d. central: about 800 yards.

This will be held as follows :—

"C" Company on the right, "D," "A," and "B" on the left, in touch with the 24th Royal Fusiliers.

Regimental Headquarters at the Cross Roads at P.8. a.5.8."

I returned to find the Company digging in on the switch line. The 63rd Division had retired and joined up with "C" Company. The remaining Divisions of the 5th Corps were to fall back through our line at 3 p.m. The Corps' front had been considerably shortened by the evacuation of the Flesquières salient yesterday, and at noon the front line was held by two Divisions, the 17th and 47th, with two Divisions in support, the 2nd and 63rd. The 19th Division had been lent to the 4th Corps and had counter-attacked on the evening of the 21st.

The weather was very warm, and digging became thirsty work. By 2 p.m. each man had dug himself a small hole with a thin parapet, and work was started to connect these holes into one trench. All the Companies except "B" had taken over partially dug trenches, very wide and shallow, such as we had been digging for the last two months when in Brigade reserve. They were to prove their uselessness this day; though "B" Company had to dig like fury, yet we were better off in our little holes, when once they had been dug deep and narrow. However, in front of this so-called "prepared" position there were four rows of wire, both apron and chevaux-de-frise.

At midday a battery of field artillery took up a position in front of this wire, but before it had been in action half an hour, it was subjected to indirect machine gun fire from Velu Wood. The battery limbered up at once and galloped away, the guns being drawn by only one pair of horses. It was a a very thrilling sight, and reminiscent of a picture by Lady Butler.



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At 2 p.m. from the commanding position of our trench, we could plainly see the enemy streaming over the sky line, in pursuit of our troops, who were retiring in good order, covered by machine guns in rear and Lewis guns on the flanks.

We telephoned through to our guns to concentrate on the enemy masses, but in vain. Not a shot was fired by our guns! They must have been trekking back.

Through glasses every movement and signal could be spotted, and men could be seen to fall, here and there. There was no shell fire or smoke to obscure the view; it was open warfare in very truth. By 3 p.m. the rearguard troops had passed through our line and retired to another so-called "line" behind, which was non-existent except for rows of wire without a trench behind them. These troops formed a very heterogeneous crowd; men of different regiments, Divisions and Corps, all retiring under unknown officers in many cases. None of them seemed to know where they were going next, nor the line of retirement. It looked a rather sorry rabble, very nearly constituting a rout.

Two officers of the 25th Machine Gun Corps, and six men, all that remained of 50, took up a position in "B" Company's section of trench, and mounted their sole remaining gun. One of the officers came to me for some water and food, as he had been without rations and water for three days. I had to refuse his request for water, because we were already short, and did not know for how long we might be compelled to subsist on our water bottles. I managed to find a tin of bully for him and some neat whisky, for which he was very grateful. He was in a pitiful state; his face was black from powder, his hands bleeding, his jacket ripped from shoulder to wrist by shrapnel, and his puttees and breeches torn to ribbons by wire. He said he had been blown up three times and had had three guns destroyed under his hand. He had lost his Division which had retired early in the morning, and he informed me that he intended to stay with us and see it through. He was rather bitter about certain troops, who, he said, had retired without orders and left him and his guns in the lurch. It sounded bad enough that such a thing should happen, but we were to experience the same very shortly. Such was the disorganisation caused by the rapid advance of the enemy, that orders often did not reach the front line troops simultaneously, and, indeed, some never received orders at all.

At 3 p.m. we became the front line troops, and all the gaps in the wire were closed with movable chevaux-de-frise.

The enemy followed up very quickly, and the trench was soon peppered with machine gun bullets. "A" Company on



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our immediate right had many casualties. The enemy worked a light machine gun forward along the railway embankment which ran through our front, and from a concealed position on top he was able to enfilade the trench. The piece of trench held by "A" Company was on a slope towards the railway embankment, and every movement in the trench could, thus, be spotted by the enemy. Also, as the trench was seven feet wide and three feet deep, there was absolutely no cover; in fact it was a death trap and nearly as bad as nothing at all.

"B" Company was more fortunate. We were just over the crest and the only casualties which we suffered were due to indirect enfilade fire from the embankment.

"A" Company had a forward post in our wire, which was well placed to snipe the enemy as he worked forward. However, this post was spotted by the light machine gun team, and its position rendered untenable. "Bunjie" Littledale, commanding "A" Company, went forward to withdraw this post, and was killed, hit through the heart and neck. Next, Colvill ran the gauntlet of a hail of bullets and managed to get the men back and Littledale's body as well.

The afternoon was quiet; only heavies were in action on both sides; ours dropped some very heavy stuff into Velu Wood, while the enemy contented himself with plastering the Bertincourt-Velu road, about 400 yards behind our front line.

Towards evening, the frost came down, and the shelling on both sides increased considerably, the enemy registering his field guns on the Bertincourt-Velu road. Night came on, and with it the awful suspense of waiting for the attack that was certain to be launched against us in the morning. We dug a little and tried to improve our narrow, shallow trench. All round us the enemy's Verey lights twinkled in the sky, revealing the extent to which we were "bottle-necked." They indicated more surely than any map references the line which the enemy held. Our orders were to hold the Switch Line at all costs.

At dusk, the shell dump at Ytres was fired; all night long we could hear the distant thud of exploding shells, while occasionally the sky was lit up with a red glare of burning dumps.

The cold was intense; sleep almost impossible, and there was no mail; but rations came up. There was nothing to be done, but to wait and wait for the infernal daylight. However much we might be shelled, there was no chance of any retaliation from our guns. A rearguard is a nasty business.



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*Diary.*

*March 24th,* 1918.

At 2 a.m. I was woken up by an orderly from a cramped sleep and told that George Field, commanding "B" Company wanted to see me. He gave me a message to read, the purport of which was that we might have to retire before dawn to another position in rear.

The hours slipped by, but no orders came through, and the suspense grew greater every minute. Dawn came, a glorious spring dawn; we stood-to-arms. No orders. No sign of an enemy attack.

Just as it was getting light, two German officers came forward to reconnoitre our wire and succeeded in finding two gaps made by heavy shells. They were allowed to wriggle through one row, and then No. 8 Platoon stopped any further nonsense by shooting them neatly!

George Field, Wilsdon, and I had some breakfast at 8 a.m., and then went back to our posts, expecting brother Boche to come and maul us at any moment.

However, at 8.50 an orderly came to me with a message, the one word "Corunna," the code word to retire. I went along to Field who gave me orders to retire with No. 8 Platoon from the extreme left. I was the only officer with a map of the area, and I was given the job of leading the Company. I handed over No. 6 Platoon to Serjeant Stevens and led out No. 8.

We started in single file through our wire, behind the trench. There was a stretch of 400 yards before we could reach the Bertincourt-Velu road. No sooner were we all in the open than the enemy opened machine gun fire on us; we carried on steadily; and then, as it were, a thunderstorm seemed to burst over our heads in a deafening roar. The sun, which shone with all his might, was suddenly blotted out by the yellow acrid smoke of shrapnel bursting overhead. The ground shot up all round in fountains of black smoke and earth. Everything on all sides was being heaved into the air. The Nissen huts bordering the road parallel to our line of retreat were flattened in one blast. Hell's fiery furnace was let loose.

I looked round and tried to collect the men together, because they were inclined to straggle, and even as I did so, a whizzbang caught the slanting roof of a Nissen hut a few feet away on my right, and cut away Private Grey's legs. Another man and I tried to lift him, but he was too badly hit, and we had to leave him to the enemy.

We crossed the road and halted behind a manure heap for a breather. Field and Wilsdon came up, and the former



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tried to shout orders to me; but it was not wise to wait too long in any one place, for five whizzbangs burst on the other side of the midden, showering manure all over us.

And so we retired in small parties to the Bertincourt-Haplincourt road, through some stables, and out again into the open.

Meanwhile, Bertincourt was being plastered with every conceivable type of damnation, and the noise was terrific. I never expected to see any of the Headquarter officers again.

It was a great relief to be free of the roads and buildings, and to be in the open again. The heat seemed to be very intense, and the men were black and dripping with sweat; mostly battle sweat, for the sun was not hot enough to cause such perspiration. We marched on, through the Green Line, up the slope, and past some machine gunners who had dug in to cover our retreat.

During this retirement, it was possible to see to what extent the British were, in fact, "bottle-necked." For miles I could see our troops filtering back across the rolling downs towards one spot, one narrow channel, while machine gun fire came from three sides.

On reaching the ridge in front of the Barastre-Bus road, we met Brett, and there we sorted out 52nd men, recognisable by the Regimental ribbon on their steel helmets, from the rabble of troops of all divisions of the 5th Corps, who were retiring through this narrow neck.

We formed up into Companies as the men came in, and having reformed, reported to Brett. "B" Company was ordered to go back to the original map reference* given in the "Corunna" message, and Field led the Company back to an old German line running between Rocquigny and Barastre.

On our way back, we passed through Vimiera Camp, where we had rested on the morning of the 22nd. I noticed a man dart into a hut that had once been a cookhouse; presently he ran past me holding a small Union Jack, which he said the Germans could not have, though they were welcome to the Camp. When I last saw that man, the Union Jack was still protruding from his haversack!

We soon ran into the 19th Division on its way up to hold the ridge, which we had just evacuated. Having settled into the new position, we came under machine gun fire from Rocquigny on our right, and our own 4.5 howitzers mistook us for the enemy and started shelling us. Here the Company, about 40 strong, stayed until Field determined to go and join up with the 63rd Division, which was digging in on the next ridge

* O.22 central.



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behind Barastre, since there was no sign of the 52nd. Every moment we expected to see the remaining Companies appear. At midday there was still no sign of them. I went off to try and find out if any of the neighbouring troops had seen them, but all my enquiries proved fruitless.

While I was in Barastre, looking for the Regiment, I saw the tanks go up into action to cover our troops' retreat. It was very interesting to watch. The Germans had several field guns in close support to their infantry, and as the tanks waddled over the crest of the ridge the German gunners knocked them out one after the other.

In Barastre, I gleaned the news that the 2nd Division was fighting a rearguard in conjunction with the 19th, between Haplincourt and Villers-au-Flos. I delivered my information to Field, who, thereupon, decided to go back to Beaulencourt and await the 52nd there.

We marched back to the Le Transloy-Peronne road, where we found the 1st 60th Rifles digging in. Field put the Company under the command of the Colonel, and we dug in for the third time to-day, on a ridge commanding the Bapaume-Peronne road, which we had known so well during our rests in Divisional reserve during the past four months.

It was not till 5 p.m., when the enemy were in the outskirts of Le Transloy, that we met the 52nd again. It was a pitiful sight. A small column of men, led by Crosse and Brett, about 80 men all told, marched wearily up the slope. "D" Company had been cut off in Villers-au-Flos, and only 12 men under Eagle had managed to escape. David Barnes and Bailey were wounded and missing, and Vernon wounded. Ben Slocock had been killed.

Just before the 52nd came up with "B" Company, what remained of the tanks waddled through our line of posts. The enemy field guns, supporting the front line troops, had done them considerable damage, and completely incapacitated not a few. I noticed one tank crew, through my glasses, coming towards us. They all looked very strange and I could not distinguish their faces from their uniform. As they approached I could see the cause of this. The officer's face was completely raw, all the skin off his forehead and face hung like an icicle from the tip of his nose, while the skin of his jaw and chin encircled his neck in a grey fold, like an Elizabethan ruff. His hands were raw too, and he gave me the impression of having been lathered in blood. Actually, he and his crew had been flayed in a burning tank, and he was the most badly burnt of all, as he was last to leave. He asked for some water. I handed him my waterbottle, but he held up his hands and said he could not touch anything. So I poured



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as much as I could spare down his open mouth ; then he went on back towards Albert. Wounded men came crawling up to our posts, too, beseeching us to carry them back to the main Albert road on our stretchers ; these pitiful requests had to be refused, because our stretcher-bearers were already doing the work of four times their number.

One man with a shattered ankle, crawled up to me and asked me to get him taken back. When I told him that it was impossible, he started off dragging his ankle, and said he would get back to Albert as he was, rather than be taken prisoner. The pluck of the man!

At 5.45 p.m. the whole of the 5th Brigade moved back as a Brigade across the Somme battlefield from Beaulencourt, which was burning, to Ligny-Thilloy. The 52nd formed the rearguard for the Brigade, and "B" Company was detailed for the rear party and flank guards. My platoon formed the left flank guard. Away on our left marching in the same direction as ourselves at 2,000 or 3,000 yards interval, was a German column. We took no more notice of them than they did of us!

The shell-hole country over which we had to march made our progress very fatiguing. Grass and weeds had, in the course of time, matted over the old shell-holes, preventing one from being able to see where the actual holes were. The troops were dog-tired after a hard day, and these last four miles, as dusk came on, were heart-breaking ; stumbling first to the right, climbing out of one shell-hole only to step into another ; up and down and round and never a solid step ahead, every minute of waning light making a path more difficult to find.

Eventually, at about 7 p.m., the 52nd halted at Ligny-Thilloy and we had an hour's rest by the side of the road, and never has a ditch seemed so soft. Every man was fast asleep as he threw himself down. At 10 p.m. ammunition was served out and the 52nd took up an outpost position between the 24th Royal Fusiliers and the 74th. The 6th Brigade continued the line on the right of the latter. The night was bitterly cold after the spring warmth of the day, and a frosty wind sprang up to make it chillier still.

Rations came up in the night, and we had lunch on tea mixed with tobacco and boiled in shell-hole water. The element of tobacco rather spoilt the tea, making it taste very bitter, but the shell-hole water was infinitely better than that which came up in petrol tins for our consumption, as it proved to be composed of about three parts water to one part petrol, and was almost worse than nothing. The hot tea did us a world of good and made up for everything else. Thus ended the longest day of my life.



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*Diary.*

*March 25th*, 1918.

At 2 a.m. orders came to move again, and the 5th Brigade marched, half asleep, through Le Barque on to the main Bapaume-Albert road. This was a silent march, as the enemy had been reported to be in our rear, in which case we were cut off. On reaching the main road, there was a halt of 30 minutes, to allow the 6th Brigade to catch us up.

There was a faint grey streak in the eastern sky as we passed the famous Butte de Warlencourt; the very road on which we were marching had been mended by the Regiment just a year ago, after the Boche retreated early in 1917; and just as dawn was breaking, we wheeled off the road into the ruined village of Courcelette. The march along the road had been quite a pleasure compared to the Somme battlefield of yesterday, but it was galling to pass all the well-known landmarks and to realise that all this hardly won tract of country was slipping back once more into the enemy's hands.

At Courcelette, where the 52nd had held the line for three months in 1917, we had a really long rest of two hours, and moreover, a hot breakfast. Before falling out, the Commanding Officer formed the Regiment up in line and called it to attention. "A" and "B" Companies became No. 1 Company under George Field, and "C" and "D" No. 2 Company under Percy Bobby. Then he said, "When you fall out, I want to see every man get some wood and drum up at once."

No sooner had the men thrown off their equipment than wood was collected, and fires were going everywhere, in true Light Infantry style. By 7.15 a.m. the Regiment had had a hot meal, and the majority of the men were already asleep.

Meanwhile, the poor old Brigadier was in a state of collapse. We had passed him on entering Courcelette, sitting on a blasted tree stump holding his head in his hands. Each Company had marched at attention, but he was far too weary to rise up and take the salute. Behind him, stood the Brigade Major, looking like death; and in this state, I saw the Brigade Staff for the first and last time, during these operations!

At 8.45 p.m. we took up a position, facing east, along the ridge overlooking Dyke Valley, and commanding Le Sars and the Bapaume-Albert road. This was a very fine position, indeed. The 6th Brigade continued the line to the left, and behind us, we had one battery of 18-pounders. On the right there was not a sign of a soul! In front, the 99th Brigade was fighting a rearguard action, and was to retire through us to another ridge behind.

Owing to the excellence of the position, and the fact that the enemy had not managed to move his guns forward, we



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could have held on for a long time. Our only difficulties were scarcity of ammunition and our right flank; of the former we only had the 120 rounds which each man carried, the latter was completely in the air.

Here, however, was excellent scope for good and controlled fire, and through field glasses I could see every movement of the enemy. Though we only held here for half an hour, we had some good fun bringing down the enemy as they advanced across the open from Le Sars towards Courcelette. The Boches were no fools; they were well trained and made excellent use of ground and cover, and never exposed themselves unnecessarily. Their first consideration was, always, to manoeuvre the light machine guns forward, to cover the advance of the rest. Through my glasses, I picked up a man carrying one of these guns, and directed my Lewis gun on to him; that man never carried that or any other gun again! It was almost impossible to miss the enemy from this commanding position, and our Lewis guns were doing good execution and holding up the enemy's advance, when we, once again, received orders to retire, because the enemy, as was his cunning way, was crawling round our flanks.

For the rest of the day we retired continuously across the shell-scarred and desolate Somme Plateau, past the ruins of Pys, where Eagle and I had spent an unpleasant evening in February '17 pursuing the retreating Boche; back we trekked from ridge to ridge with the enemy always close on our heels, and our flanks continually exposed. The weather, too, had changed and a bitter north wind was blowing.

At last, we halted on the left bank of the river Ancre, opposite Beaucourt-sur-Ancre. Here we had tea, the second meal of the day, at 6 p.m.

I never saw a Staff Officer after leaving Courcelette. There seemed to be nobody in command of the Brigade, and, likewise, no one met us when we reached the river, to pass on orders! Brett had gone back, early in the afternoon, to report the situation to Divisional Headquarters if he could find them.

While we were having tea, some machine gunners on the the heights of Beaucourt must have mistaken us for the enemy, for they opened fire on us. However, they were bad shots, and we were too tired to take any notice of them.

At dusk, we crossed the Ancre at the ford, and took up a position on the heights of Beaucourt on the right bank, with strong points pushed forward to guard the ford across the river.

So ended a fatiguing day, to be followed by a bitterly cold night and little or no sleep. The wind whistled over the river from Thiepval; the long disused dug-outs were damp and musty;



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the wind seemed to freeze one's clothes to one's body ; and as bitter as the wind, was the fact that we were occupying the trenches held by the Regiment in November 1916, eighteen months ago.

*Diary.*

*March 26th,* 1918.

At " stand-to," orders came to pack up and retire again. Accordingly, " B " Company descended the steep slope to the Beaumont-Hamel road. The morning was very cold and foggy, and I led my platoon through Beaumont-Hamel, where I joined up with Bobby. Our orders were to retire to Auchonvillers, but, when we were half way there, Brett met us and told us that the retirement was cancelled. So we trekked back again to the position we had just left, the march being enlivened by 8-inch shells from our guns falling on the road at Beaucourt. So we left the road and took a short cut to our old position, as it is never wise to argue with an 8-inch shell ! !

The sun had just risen when we settled down to improve the position ; and our aeroplanes were crowding the sky, which was a pleasant sight after four days without the sight of one. One of these 'planes, however, flew over us at 200 feet, and the observer, in a fit of misplaced efficiency, fired on us deliberately, which was a poor trick, because we could not retaliate. Luckily, he too, was a rotten shot. We lit some flares and put them on the parados, to show him our position, and deter him from shooting us up. These seemed to tickle him so much that he turned and plugged at us again. At this moment, Brett came along the trench and cursed me into fits for giving our position away to the enemy by lighting flares. I told him the reason, and his answer was to the effect that —— aeroplanes might shoot at us for a week and never hit us, but that I ought to know by now what the Boche gunners could do ! !

No sooner had we made fire-steps in this old trench than the order came to retire, so we filed off and took up another position in the old British front line before the advance at Beaumont-Hamel in '16. It was not nearly such a good position : our field of fire was limited to 100 yards, and we could not see the ford across the Ancre : the trench was very narrow and shallow and digging in the chalk subsoil was very difficult.

No. 1 Company was on the right and No. 2 on the left ; from the latter's position we could see the enemy's guns being brought into action, while, away on our right, across the river, we could see the enemy wandering about on the crest of Thiepval ridge.



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Ellam and I scrounged about and found an old dug-out, which had partially collapsed at the bottom. It was damp and cold and musty at the bottom, and smelt of decay, rats, and putrescent vegetation and food. But, here I found a half-opened tin of bully beef, and picking out the biggest pieces of chalk with my penknife, ate the remainder of the contents. How the tin had got there, or how long it had been there, I never stopped to consider. We had been through strenuous days, marching far over shell-torn country on underfed stomachs, never knowing if or when we should see food again, and here, at least, was a form of food! But never shall I forget the taste in my mouth after it! For four days I had a dry stickiness in my mouth, incessant heartburn, and a feeling of overwhelming depression, which almost blotted out the instinct of life. Ellam would not touch it, and, therein he was wiser than I.

As a matter of fact the Regimental Transport had achieved a well-nigh impossible task by getting rations up to the Regiment all through the retreat, when roads were blocked for miles and miles with all manner of guns and transport. We never starved like some less fortunate regiments.

We had not occupied this trench for more than one and a half hours, before the enemy patrols entered the trench opposite. For the rest of the day No. 2 Company was kept busy sniping them.

At midday we heard the grim tidings of the Brigade Major's ride to find touch with the troops on our left. He had set off after we had left Courcelette, and had ridden for six miles and never seen a soldier. Divisions had seemed to disappear into thin air, and behind, there was not a single rifle to support us. Bar the 8-inch shells which had nearly blown the few remnants of the Regiment to bits in the early morning, not a single gun had barked at the enemy for 24 hours. Incidently, Brett had told me that, when we had received orders to march on Auchonvillers in the morning, the village was already in enemy hands, and, luckily, he had met someone on the road who asked him where he was going, and on hearing his reply, had advised him to go elsewhere!

At 2 p.m. it started! Shells screamed over and crashed behind in the unoccupied support trench. We could watch the blighters serving the guns and were powerless to hinder them. For two hours it continued, but little damage was done as the trenches were so close together that a short one was likely to do the enemy more harm than us.

Then, at 4 p.m., the joyful tidings came round the line like wildfire that we were to be relieved at night, and that the Australian and New Zealand Corps were behind us. It seemed that the impossible and improbable was to happen, and I had



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visions of being allowed to sleep the clock round. The troops were hardly delighted; they probably didn't believe the tidings, and the majority were past caring what happened. Many rumours had floated round when we were trekking like hell yesterday. One was that we had made a counter-stroke and captured Lille and that the Belgians were advancing on Ostend! As usual, the yarn had emanated from Refilling Point, that useful source of all lying rumours.

However, late in the afternoon, the tidings were confirmed in very truth, for we could see the Australians advancing in artillery formation along the sky line, away on our left. I don't think I have ever seen such a cheering sight.

A bitterly cold night drew on, and still no sign of the 12th Division, which was supposed to relieve us. Hope waned, flickered, and went out; and, then, suddenly at midnight, an order came for us to pack up once more and evacuate the line as the 12th Division was going to hold another position in rear.

*Diary.*

*March 27th,* 1918.

At 12.30 a.m. we filed out and marched through the cold, moonlit night, across the fields towards Mailly-Maillet. It was a long and wearisome tramp, for clods of ploughed earth stuck to our boots and still further weighed down our tired legs. The woods of the village, a black mass in the moonlight, never seemed to get any nearer, and when, at last, we reached our destination, there was no guide to meet us, and we marched completely round the place before the blighter was found.

It was a pathetic sight, this village which had only seen a year of freedom from war. The inhabitants had all fled, except here and there an old man or woman, who refused to move whatever happened. The only reassuring sight was the presence of Anzac troops resting by the roadside in the village.

The guide led us back to the point where we had first entered the village, and then on down the road to Mailly Wood. At 3 a.m. we settled down for the remainder of the night, but the enemy started shelling the wood with heavy stuff and German aeroplanes must have spotted the fires, for a shower of bombs suddenly arrived and made the place very unhealthy. Once more we packed up and moved out of the woods and lay down beside the road. A battalion of New Zealanders passed us here, marching in fours to rollicking tunes from a brass band! The fact that the village was under direct artillery fire did not seem to deter these enthusiasts. Had I had any guts left in me, I could 'scarce have forborne to cheer.'



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At 5 a.m. the 52nd cookers hove in sight, and we had some hot tea, which was very refreshing; immediately afterwards we moved on again down the Warloy road and halted in a small copse. Here we had breakfast, and then lay down, but the wind was so bitingly cold that sleep was almost impossible, and we were almost too tired to sleep.

Rumours flew round that the Division was going back to Abbeville, but these were discounted at 6 p.m. when we had orders to pack up again and go back to a position in support of the 12th Division. Our hopes of a relief were dashed to pieces, and, indeed it seemed that we were for it once more.

At 7, we marched off by road through Mailly-Maillet and Englebelmer to Martinsart, where guides met us and led us to Aveluy Wood. We hardly seemed to march, for whenever we got into step, there was a halt, and it seemed that one was always dragging a weary body out of a soft and comfortable ditch to advance a mere 100 yards. On one of these halts, Ellam came up to me holding a full bottle of champagne which an old civilian had given him as we passed through Mailly-Maillet, and offered me a swig; I refused it because I knew the results of fizz on my stomach in its present condition only too well; never for one second was I free of heartburn!

On all these short halts the men fell asleep, almost where they stood, and a minute's sleep seemed an age, but hardly had we sat down before the order came to advance. And in such wise, by short stages, we found ourselves back again in the line in support of the 12th Division, with the 5th Brigade on the right and the 99th on the left, and the 6th in reserve at Englebelmer.

All ranks were allowed to rest still "stand-to" when we had a scratch breakfast. From that time onwards, there was plenty of scrapping in front of us, and the enemy started shelling heavily with shrapnel and high explosive, which reverberated through the wood in intensified and re-echoing crashes. His patrols, too, were very active, feeling their way to get in touch with the 12th Division. As usual, the Boches pushed their light machine guns well forward and inflicted many casualties on the Royal Sussex, just in front of us. At one time, it seemed that they would break through, but George Field sent up two platoons to support the front line. They drove out the machine gunners and captured some prisoners. One of the latter had on a British soldier's jacket under his own.

The shelling increased as the day grew on, until at midday, it had become more than uncomfortable. It seemed perfectly obvious that the enemy was going to attack; the wood and the back areas were being searched with all manner of



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damnation. Late in the afternoon the attack was launched, in small numbers, and completely repulsed.

By this time I was a sick man. I could not hold any solid food and not always the chlorinated water, while diarrhoea reduced me to weak listlessness. I could just stagger and no more, and whether a 5.9 hit me or not, or any of the filth flying about, I cared not a tinker's cuss. So, the Colonel sent me down to Martinsart, which was being shelled to glory with 5.9's, where I spent a most uncomfortable night in a cellar, that is to say, as much of the night as a disordered stomach would allow.

*Diary.*

*March 29th,* 1918.

At 7.30 Brett and I started off for the Transport, and were lucky to get a lift in a limber all the way from Englebelmer to Lealvillers, where all the reinforcements and details were being formed into a composite Brigade. Lowndes and Murray commanded the Regiment's contingent, the former relinquishing his appointment of A.D.C. to General Pereira in order to take part. His devotion was rewarded with a wound in the ankle which took him back to England. At the Transport I was offered some food which, like a fool, I ate, but never digested; and then I crawled into a flea-bag, and slept till sundown when the Doctor came and saw me. He said I was a filthy colour, and pushed me off in an ambulance to Doullens.

Wounded were streaming in, the hospital enclosure was covered with rows of stretchers, three deep, and ever more coming in. The Sisters hardly had time to look at the labels, and anybody who could move a muscle was immediately evacuated to the Base. High pressure is hardly the expression for such superhuman efforts, and yet, with it all, they remained unflurried and cool, and just worked on in quiet efficiency that staggered the onlooker.

*R.J.N.N.* *"D" Infantry Base Depot.*

*July 15th,* 1918. *Rouen.*

The journey went off very well, indeed. We sailed from Southampton in the *Prince George* at about 8 p.m. The boat was crowded with Americans, and Dick Warren and I got talking to some, and they were very interesting and amusing.

We reached Havre on Friday at 5 a.m., and disembarked at 8, and went to the Officers' Club and had some breakfast.



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I managed to get a bunk on the boat and slept beautifully, although two officers in the cubby hutch were violently ill ! ! At Havre, Dick and I pal'd up to a Staff Officer on G.H.Q., and he met a R.T.O. who got us permission to travel on the civilian train to Rouen. We left Havre at 9, reached Rouen at midnight, and went to an hotel, got up at 10, and reported here at 12.

I am posted to the 52nd for record purposes, which means that I may go anywhere. But I've written to Colonel Crosse and asked him to make a special application for me.

Yesterday, Dick and I and two others went up the river in a rowing boat, and had tea in a small pub. In the evening we had a very expensive dinner in the town. The prices these French people charge are simply scandalous.

To-day we all had to go through gas, both lachrymatory and chlorine, and have spent most of the day in those blackguard helmets. It seems incredible to me that I am back again in France. It seems only yesterday that I left.

I think I shall be here for a few days longer.

*R.J.N.N.* *"D" Infantry Base Depot.*

*July 19th,* 1918. *Rouen.*

To-night I am pushing off from this spot to go back to the 52nd, thank Allah ! I shall be much happier when I've settled down with the old crowd of friends again. There will be a great many of the old gang. Bob FitzGerald comes up with me to-night and another man whom I knew at Dover. We are parading at 7.30 p.m., so that means a fiendish night in the train, probably in a carriage without windows or doors or cushions on the seats. Travelling by train is no joke in France.

I must now go and eat my supper before pushing off. Its good-bye to civilisation, but I somehow feel that my luck is still in. I'm not much looking forward to being under fire again, and though I've had a good rest, it makes one more windy because one has almost forgotten what it is like.

*M.K.N.* *'D" Infantry Base Depot.*

*July 19th,* 1918. *Rouen.*

This is just a line to tell you that I am leaving the Base this evening to join the 52nd. I was dreading that I might be sent elsewhere.

There is some splendid news from the French and Americans, to-day ; quite cheering to get good news again, though we must not expect anything big as yet. The Boche,



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apparently, has got about 50 untouched divisions to play about with, and that means that he is sure to attack somewhere else to try and break through before Christmas. Sometimes I feel that there is a faint hope of it being over before the winter. The German soldiers will be so fed up if it isn't.

The Americans on the boat seemed to think that 1920-1921 would see it all over.

I am going up to-night with Bob FitzGerald and one other. Dick Warren went up two days ago.

*R.J.N.N.* *52nd Light Infantry Transport Lines.*

*July 21st,* 1918. *Pommier.*

I wrote you a letter from the Base just before I left. I forgot to thank you very much indeed for the corner of England you have given me. It is sweet of you, and it's nice to think that I possess a piece of the dear old country.

I arrived up here with the Regiment yesterday, in time for tea. We started off the evening before, i.e. Friday, and had quite a good journey, in a 1st class carriage with windows and doors complete, a marvellous thing for a troop train.

We reached the railhead early in the afternoon, and got a light railway up to this village where the transport lines are. It is a nice little village too.

I was greeted by many old faces. It was topping to see them again? "Shiny," "Twitt," Philip Booth, George Field, and all the old gang of this time a year ago. I have been posted to "C" Company this time, not my old Company which was as you know, "B."

There is very little news; this part of the line seems to be very quiet, nothing much doing except raids every other night. By the way, what do you think of the Franco-American counter-stroke? It looks as if the Germans might be cut off as we nearly were in March. News came through last night that we had taken 360 guns and 17,000 prisoners, which is the best bit of news we've had this year.

I am going up to the line to-morrow with Bobby, my new Captain. The Regiment is very strong in officers now. It looks as if something might happen soon.

*R.J.N.N.* *Front Line. Left Sector.*

*July 29th,* 1918. *Ayette.*

I was very astounded to hear that someone had written to the War Office and complained about the hospital next door. I can't think who it could have been. There is absolutely nothing to complain about in the food.



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I am so glad to hear that you have been speaking in the House. I hope you will keep it up in the future! I heard from Angela that you will probably be going to Sloley in August. How I wish I was going to be down there.

We, however, are having a pretty quiet time. The 2nd Division has been in the line now for two months and there is no sign of a relief at present. "Bingo" Baines' Division is just behind us, and I went over to see him, as I think I told you.

We are now in reserve, and quite comfortable; but we are moving forward again to-night. Last night "C" Company gave a dinner. It was most cheery, and Philip Booth was killingly funny, keeping the whole party in fits of laughter.

We have had a lot of rain lately; one night the water poured through this hut and nearly flooded us out. By Jove, it is good to be back with the Regiment again. This sector is like the one we were in this time last year. Toby Sturges is due back to-day. I hope to see him soon; he's going to take over the Transport, a job that should suit him very well.

*B.H.A.N.*

*August 2nd,* 1918. *Ayette.*

Yes, I wish I was back in "B" Company most awfully. There are very few, if any, that you know in "C". Bobby, Wayte (a good fellow indeed), Bartlett, "Sailor" Barnes, and I. The officers of "C," since I've been out, have always been oldish men, and not like the young and skittish "B," which has by far the nicest lot now, consisting of John Blagrove, a 43rd man and awfully nice, William Giles, Dick Warren, young "Bingo," Wilsdon, and Dashwood, a splendid crowd altogether. Never mind, one company is as good as another, though it is rather sickening after 16 months with "B" Company to be posted to another.

We have had a very quiet four days in the line, and up till now no casualties. There are umpteen Americans attached to us, so that only one Company of the 52nd is in the front line, one in support, one in reserve, and the fourth out altogether. The Yanks are fearfully keen and dangerous to their friends!

*R.J.N.N.* *Front Line.*

*August 2nd,* 1918. *Ayette.*

The other day, I went over to see the Guards Division on the immediate left and found Maurice Buxton in command of a company of Coldstreamers. We had a long chat together. It was good luck striking him. He says there are 19 Old Etonians in his battalion. I've had a note from Tommy



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Tallents to go over and have tea with him when I'm out of the line. I ought to meet a lot of old friends there.

We have had quite a quiet time in the line so far. The Americans are fearfully keen, but rather dangerous! They loose off at anything, and never wait to see who it is; even when they are in support behind the front line, they are apt to fire at anyone going along the top between posts!! I'm afraid their discipline is not all that it should be, but they will soon knuckle down and lose that keenness which almost amounts to suicide. They had three men knocked out by their own men. One officer, their Intelligence bird, was shot through the neck by their Colour Serjeant Instructor in Musketry! and two privates were killed by some of their mates while cleaning rifles. Casualties from enemy action, NIL!! The Intelligence officer is not expected to live.

M'tutor's won the cricket cup, last half, for the first time.

*R.J.N.N.* *Reserve Trenches.*

*August 5th,* 1918. *Ayette.*

We had quite a quiet time in the front line, but since then the Boche has shelled considerably. I think he has got wind of the American Allies now attached to us.

I have just come up from a 48 hours rest at the Transport Lines at Pommier. I went into Doullens, where I was in hospital on March 30th, with Philip Booth. We did some shopping, and had a lift back in a car. The whole of this morning I was sitting on a court-martial. I loathe it; I feel so sorry for the poor devils accused. All for now.

*R.J.N.N.*

*August 13th,* 1918. *Humbercamp.*

What do you think of the offensive in the south? Most cheering news. It practically nullifies the enemy's push of last Spring. We have heard all sorts of rumours, but I don't think the majority are true.

On Saturday, Dick Warren and I set off on an expedition to the coast to try and see Toby Sturges who was celebrating his 21st birthday on August 11th. He had asked "Fritz" Eagle. "Shiny," Dick and me, to dine with him at Paris Plage. Well, only Dick and I could go; we reached a pretty town called Auxi-le-Chateau quite easily, but unfortunately got into the wrong lorry there, and failed to get to Abbeville for the night which was our objective. So we spent the night in Auxi in a Y.M.C.A. tent, and made ourselves very comfortable. We started off early and hopped lorries, with difficulty



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to Abbeville. The road was very pretty, and the country far more like England than most parts of France, while the day was glorious, reminding me of Norfolk and the sunny cornfields. From Abbeville we got into a R.A.F. car going to Boulogne and passed through G.H.Q. and overstepped the road to Etaples. So back we came, and finally landed up very dusty, hot and hungry in Paris Plage, only to find no Toby to meet us. It was most unfortunate.

We spent the night at Etaples. The latter and Abbeville have been badly knocked about with bombs, and the inhabitants have to leave the town at nights and go into the country. It is very pathetic to see them going away with their children in tow.

Dick and I started back at 9.30 yesterday, and, stopping at Abbeville for an excellent lunch, had completed three-quarters of the journey by 2.30 p.m. Returning was much easier than going, and more comfortable too. I enjoyed the trip very much, except for the dust which was terrific. It was great fun seeing the country; and I reckon that we covered 200 miles in the two days that we were away.

We were allowed to go because the 52nd is out of the line in billets in Humbercamp, for the first time for 59 days, and as we are fearfully strong in officers, the Colonel let us go. Moreover, I am going down to Boulogne to see Toby for a night, before he crosses to England for his Instructor's Course.

The weather is simply divine; days to sit under the beech and peel peaches and throw away the rind. I do miss the fresh fruit and vegetables, but I'm in excellent health.

From the first news of the push, it looked as if there was some chance of the end, but apparently the enemy has stopped the advance. However, it is good to be able to take the offensive again, and show the Boche and the Americans that we have still got a very poisonous bite.

*B.H.A.N.* *Transport Lines.*

*August 16th,* 1918. *Pommier.*

Toby suddenly turned up on Tuesday to spend his 21st birthday with the Regiment. A party of six of us went to the 6th Corps Officers' Club at Bavincourt and had a rattling good dinner. We managed to get a lorry most of the way back, and on our return "Shiny" instigated a rag on S——B——, and gave him a bogus message to turn out the Transport at 4 a.m. He sucked it all down most beautifully, and kept "Shiny" gassing about the reasons for the order and whether "Shiny" thought it was necessary for him to go in person!



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I got leave to go down to Boulogne with Toby, and I saw him off yesterday. It was rather heart-rending to see the boats going out. After he had gone, I waited about for the returning leave boat to try and cadge a lift in a staff car. I found one due to go back with an Olympian to Sarton, which is quite close to us.

When the boat came in, I plucked up courage and asked a Brigadier if he would give me a lift. He was very kind, and also rather amused at my dress, namely shorts, stockings and shoes! He had been recalled off leave after only two days of fishing in Ireland, and was very sick. He treated me like a son!

From Corps Headquarters at Sarton I expected to tramp back to our Transport Lines at Pommier, but he told the driver to take me the whole way back. Jolly sporting of him. He was a nice old man.

*R.J.N.N.*

*August 20th,* 1918. *Ayette.*

Just a line to tell you that I am all right. "Shiny" is going on leave on the 25th. I shall be able to send a letter to you by him.

This front is extraordinarily quiet; rather like the La Bassée front of last summer, and in a way better, because the ground is undulating, and our front line is on the crest of a ridge, and we can't be observed walking about behind it, which is a great blessing. One does get so sick of always walking about in trenches. My Company is in the front line, though not for long.

I saw a most exciting air fight yesterday, between one of our observing machines and a Boche Scout. The latter suddenly appeared from nowhere and dived on ours, but missed him. He then zoomed up and made another dive, missing for the second time. The Boche was now low over our support line and all the machine guns and Lewis guns in the neighbourhood opened on him at 200 feet. He turned and span away down wind for all he was worth. A plucky card to have come down so low over our lines, but he ought never to have got away. Our observing machine never fired at him at all for some reason. I think his gun must have jammed. He got away all right though he had a jolly narrow shave.

There seems to be a much brighter horizon than when I left. I think we have got old Fritz fried to a frazzle now.



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*Diary.*

*August 20th,* 1918.

Still in front line on the left, with "A" Company on the right. Bobby is at the Transport and I am in command of "C" Company. Had a message at about 11 a.m. to say that the Guards are going to relieve us to-night. Tank officers came up and had lunch with us. So there is going to be an attack here after all!! I thought there was more in the air than mere aeroplanes, because dumps have been formed in the night all over the place.

The Scots Guards came up in the evening, and I handed over our front to Henry Dundas, their Adjutant.

Corporal Hollyoake and Lee came in from their daylight patrol and reported that Sears had been killed. It was his first time in the line. A nice officer. Had he had more experience he would probably be still alive, but he would not listen to Corporal Hollyoake who told him to lie doggo in a shell-hole till nightfall, as soon as the enemy started firing at the party. He made a dart for the front line and was hit in the spine. Hollyoake and Lee pluckily left the shelter of their shell-hole and went to his help, experiencing a heavy fire as soon as they showed a sign of movement. They got to him unscathed, but nothing could be done for the poor chap. The Boches were very clever, for they allowed the patrol to cover half the distance of No Man's Land, which is 800 yards wide here, before they opened fire. The patrol ought never to have been allowed to go out and methinks a certain person ought to get into hot water for it, for he was out for personal kudos and sent another to reap it for him. I remember an order coming out in June 1917 forbidding daylight patrols. A waste of life.

*Diary.*

*August 21st,* 1918.

We evacuated the front line at 3.30 a.m., and marched back through rows of tanks to Hameau Switch. Got in just as the barrage started at 5 a.m. Had some breakfast, and then slept. Brown and Bartlett came up from the Transport. Orders to move came at 11 a.m., but we did not get under weigh till 1 p.m., and then marched through Adinfer to the sunken road between Ayette and Moyenville, the road which we used to patrol along. The heat was intense, and the men had some difficulty in getting along. We had just settled down and were preparing to consolidate shell-holes when the order came to occupy the old front line. The Company went back into



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exactly the same positions as it left early this morning. We shared a Company Headquarters with "A" Company in the old right front dug-out.

Had some lunch at 6.30 p.m., and then got down to it. I slept on a stretcher, and had some fairly good sleep. When shall we be for the fight? The 99th Brigade attacked this morning. A very warm night.

*R.J.N.N.*

*August 21st,* 1918. *Hameau Switch.*

All is well. Attack has been successful so far. We are in reserve. No time for more. Can't promise to write for a little while. May be busy. Yours in haste.

Best love. We're winning!!!

*August 22nd,* 1918.

All is well. We are miles back behind Adinfer Wood. Don't get the wind up. We've not been near the show. In haste; this goes by "Shiny."

*Diary* *Old British Front Line.*

*August 22nd,* 1918. *Ayette.*

Had breakfast at 4.30 a.m. A good idea though very unappetising at that hour. We can never tell what is going to happen, so we eat when we can, and not necessarily when we want to. Washed after "stand-down," which was made unpleasant by sneezing gas blowing over from the right where the attack started yesterday.

At 11 a.m. we got orders to move back to positions behind Adinfer Wood. Devilish hot day; had a halt and some food in the wood, and then pushed on to some trenches where the men bivouacked. Talked to a heavy gunner officer, who told me that the attack was going to be pressed to-morrow. Shall we be in it? A rumour said we were going right out. I don't believe it.

Had a bath in a foot bath; never done that before, but accomplished it with some success, and felt much fresher afterwards.

*Diary.*

*August 23rd.* 1918.

At midnight had orders to go and take up a position in front of Douchy, behind the Ayette road. I went on ahead and reconnoitred. The night was very hot. Had some food after the Company got in at about 1.30 a.m. We are for it now!!



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A barrage has started on the left, where the Guards are attacking. Tried to sleep, and did so to some extent, but felt too excited to keep asleep for long. Had some tea at 6.30 a.m., after which Bobby came back and told us that the Highland Light Infantry and 24th Royal Fusiliers are to take Behagnies and Sapignies, and the 52nd is to be in support. Zero at 11 a.m.

Packed up my superfluous kit and arranged as much as I could for the attack. Orders were expected at 8 a.m. It is horrible waiting to move—terrible needle.

Moved at 10 a.m. in artillery formation past Courcelles. Then we came under artillery fire; got through that, though some heavy stuff was coming over. Ahead of us loomed the blasted railway cutting of the Bapaume—Arras line. Got through that safely, though the fire was getting worse and the railway cutting was being pounded. We ran like blazes across it! The Boche was shelling like hell with gas and sneezer. Once across the railway we made a right hand turn and had to halt in the open. Whizzbangs and 5.9's were dropping all over the place. My sections took cover in shell-holes. I got into one with my Platoon Serjeant, and had a cigarette.

Shelling damned hard—moved on—enfiladed by Boche gunners with whizzbangs—Serjeant-Major Couldwell hit, two yards from me, very badly by one of these 106 fuse shells. He was literally lifted feet into the air and both his legs cut away from under him. He was going on leave the day after to-morrow—damned bad luck. Then crossed the Gomiecourt-Sapignies road in front of Triangle Copse. Whizzbangs a b—— nuisance. Got into some old gun pits and waited. I could see the Boche gunners serving the guns that were firing on us, lined up on the skyline to the left of Behagnies. Having seen the flash of the guns through binoculars, we all crouched into the gun pits until the salvo had burst. Very little damage done by these guns, but damned annoying.

The Highland Light Infantry and 24th Royal Fusiliers could not get forward. The 52nd took up a position under the lea of a steep bank about 400 yards in front of Gomiecourt, in support, and stayed there all the afternoon.

I did not have the foggiest idea what the time was. Had orders to retire to Regimental Headquarters near Triangle Copse, as the 52nd was too far forward. We got shelled on the road, so stayed where we were till dusk. Wilsdon of "B" Company got a bit of shell in his bottom as he was crossing the road, which made him hop!! We, squatting under the cover of the bank, watched this proceeding and laughed like hell. His servant carried him back pick-a-back.



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I was apportioned a position among some gun pits to which the rest of the Company was to come, but the shelling was too great. Slept in a shelter with 5.9's falling all round. My Gawd! I could sleep for a week. I've never sweated so much in all my life. The smoke and gas, as I write, are perfectly bloody—no other word.

Later. Took up a position guarding the left flank of the Brigade, and consolidated shell holes. Slept fairly well, though terribly cramped, at the corner of Triangle Copse. Shelling has diminished, but the smell of dead men and horses is filthy.

*Diary.*

*August 24th,* 1918.

Had breakfast at 3.30 a.m., on bacon and bread mixed with sugar!! Damned good. No attack on our front, though there is a terrific barrage on our right. God knows what will happen to us to-day. Just wait and see. Casualties to officers are pretty heavy. Heard that the Colonel has been hit. Damnable! Fulbrook-Leggatt, Wilsdon, Pearson and Brown. Brown has since died of his wounds. He was hit while we were waiting out in the open after crossing the railway cutting yesterday. It was his first time in the line too.

Since writing, I have had a bit of sleep and feel slightly less weary. It isn't really sleep, because one is always being woken up by shells landing in the neighbourhood. It's a kind of coma. Our Company Headquarters are in the forward edge of Triangle Copse, in a narrow trench, and in full view of "Jerry," who holds the high ground in front. But we've not been shelled yet! That will come, all in good time, I think.

I can now look back on yesterday's attack. The waiting to go forward was awful. I longed to be on the move. We passed the old front line, and by Jove, our gunners had made mince-meat of it. Of course, being the regiment in support, we came in for most of the Boche barrage. The railway was a nasty customer! But the worst part came when we had to make a complete right wheel, thus exposing our flanks. Then it was that we came in for 5.9's and whizzbangs!! All is quiet, at present. Bobby went away to Regimental Headquarters, and has just come back to say that the 52nd is to take over the front line from the 60th (99th Brigade) to-day, and that the whole 3rd Army is pushing forward to-morrow. That means that we shall attack at dawn to-morrow. At it again!!



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The Boche seems to be going to retire to his Hindenburg Line again. And that means that we shall be living in desolated country for the winter. O hell! It is so horribly depressing.

We moved off at about midday, to take over the front line from the 60th Rifles, advancing in small parties to avoid detection from the Behagnies ridge. The enemy was very quiet and never shelled us at all: we managed to take over the outpost line without any casualties. It was very interesting; we pushed forward patrols in conjunction with the 37th Division on our right, feeling for the enemy; one of these patrols reached the Sapignies Switch Line unmolested, crossed the Arras-Bapaume road, and established itself in shell-holes on the other side. Another patrol, however, in trying to reach Behagnies got shot up badly and had to retire.

Our Company Headquarters were established in a Boche dug-out, on a slight ridge, from which we could see into the village of Sapignies. The whole afternoon was spent trying to advance still further, but Behagnies was tenaciously held; so Bobby and I had some tea, sitting at the top of the dug-out steps. A Major in the Rifle Brigade came up and spoke to Bobby, and I thought I recognised his face; he turned out to be Frank Gull who was at m'tutor's, though long before my time. We had a short chat about our revered "Muggins," while he was having a cup of tea with us. I believe he was killed shortly after leaving us.

Later on, we heard that the 37th Division had occupied the village of Biefvillers, so we packed up and pushed forward. Our next Headquarters were practically in the Sapignies Switch, but we could go no further, because "D" Company on the left was held up by machine gun fire from our old friend, Behagnies.

We prepared to spend the night in our new Headquarters, and an excellent dinner was served up by my faithful servant, Private Midwinter, from some extra rations which I had managed to scrounge from Bob FitzGerald, who had had them passed on to him by an unknown Colonel. We had soup, tinned salmon, rabbit, and toasted cheese!

Soon after nightfall, the Boches started shelling with their filthy sneezing gas; it was so damnably strong that there was nothing for it but to try and sleep in a gas mask, which is no easy feat. The outposts, too, came in for a pretty heavy strafe, but they were well scattered in shell-holes and the enemy could have had no accurate idea of their positions. It amounted to random shelling by heavies, and did us little damage.



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*Diary.*

*August 25th*, 1918.

At 3 a.m. Bobby received orders to move at once to the Headquarters of the 24th Royal Fusiliers. Orderlies rushed off to the outposts to withdraw the platoons, and at 3.30, after the last of the Company had assembled, we marched off through a thick mist, by platoons at 100 yards distance. Meanwhile, our guns were barking like blazes just behind us, while the heavies and "grandmas," boomed in the distance still further behind; and in front, the woods of Behagnies were lit up by the continual stream of bursting shells; a barrage had started in earnest.

From the Headquarters of the 24th Royal Fusiliers we were led to our own Regimental Headquarters where George Field, now commanding the Regiment since Crosse had been knocked out, gave Bobby orders to attack Sapignies.

We were the last of the Companies to arrive, and it was now well after 4 a.m., and our barrage had started at 3.30! The enemy's shelling with 5.9 sneezers was very heavy in front of us, and field guns were also putting down a curtain between us and the village. The filthy sneezers made us retch and spit and cough, but it was no earthly good putting on gas respirators, because the fog made it hard enough to see as it was. We started off in what we thought was the right direction for the village, but the mist and gas, hanging low on the ground, made it extremely difficult to determine with any accuracy. But we had not gone far, when we ran into "B" Company in the same plight; Bobby had a discussion with John Blagrove on the direction to take. They shouted at each other at the top of their voices to make themselves heard above the crash of shells.

Eventually, we advanced with platoons in file towards the wood in front of us. There were plenty of dead and wounded Boches lying in the first trenches we encountered, including one unfortunate man, shot through the carotid artery, spouting blood.

In the outskirts of Sapignies we put up a couple of Boches, who popped out of some huts and legged it like hell. I had a shot at one with my automatic. He fell forward with a crash and I was just congratulating myself on having, at last, killed a man with my pistol, when I realised that my Platoon Serjeant had dropped on his knee and fired simultaneously with me. After that there was little doubt whose bird the Boche was, for I knew what a good rifle shot Serjeant Brinsden was! Anyway, the shot blew the back out of the Boche's head. The other Boche was neatly floored by Corporal Hollyoake.



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So far, so good. It seemed almost too good to be true. Where were all the Boches?

We crossed the Arras-Bapaume road and occupied some trenches on the other side. My boots, puttees and socks were soaked through by the heavy dew, and it was cold squatting in the half-dug trenches. Bobby went off on his own to see if he could find "B" Company on the right; in the advance through the mist we had completely lost touch with them and at the moment had no troops on either flank; also, I think, he wanted to see if he could find any Boches, being of the fire-eating type.

While he was away I had a snack of food, there being no time like the present. It was an excellent breakfast, consisting of cold bacon and a hunk of bread covered with sugar!

Bobby, on his return, said that there was no sign of "B" Company anywhere, so I asked him if I might take a patrol and try to find touch. I was very cold and wet, and wanted some exercise to get warm, while there was always the chance of rounding up some Boches and picking up some useful souvenirs. Bobby agreed, and I called for volunteers, and eventually chose a tough gang, including Serjeant Brinsden and Private James, who was thirsting to avenge the deaths of four brothers.

The mist was becoming filmy, with, now and again, beams of light from the rising sun, when my likely party set off. We hammered at the doors of all the dug-outs for lurking Boches but were unsuccessful until we reached the main road. Here I ran into a stretcher-bearer, who put up his hands at once. He had dumped his heavy equipment on the road, from which I took a jolly little Browning automatic. His equipment resembled a walking chemist's shop, and contained a mass of little bottles, pots, and glass phials; what we would call in Norfolk, a master-piece. I pointed to the shed where we had found him hiding, and shouted, as one generally does when one doesn't know a word of a language, "More Boches inside," to which he replied, "Nix" which was about the only word I did know!

Next we found a light gun, which we handed over to our prisoner to carry. We were doing quite well, when I was suddenly aware that Serjeant Brinsden had disappeared. A moment later, I caught sight of him through a rift in the mist, running down the road in hot pursuit of some Boches. The patrol had got a bit out of hand, and had not waited for me, nor had Serjeant Brinsden called my attention to the enemy down the road. All but one other man had followed the serjeant, like hounds on a breast-high scent. The Boches turned to the right off the road, straight in the direction of "B" Company, which suited me very well. I called back the nearest men,



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formed them into line and made for the spot where I had last seen the Boches.

There was still no sign of "B" Company. This was rather awkward, because, by this time we had wandered far from the Company, and the thickness of the infernal fog prevented me from seeing exactly where I was. So we crossed the road and bore slightly to our right hoping that "B" might be a little behind us. I took out my whistle and blew it several times, and then bawled, "B Company" at the top of my voice, but no answering call came back through the mist.

However, after a while, I heard considerable shouting ahead which I thought must come from "B." I shouted back through the mist and thought I heard an answer, "Here we are." There was one man with me at the time, Private James, the others were not far off, but invisible to me. James and I and the dog-like prisoner, who had followed patiently in our footsteps, went through the intervening hedge towards the sound of the shouting. At last we found them; sure enough I could see helmets, plenty of them, floating along the top of the fog. But a second later, and then too late, I realised that these helmets contained Boche heads! Simultaneously there was a loud crack and my pistol fell out of my right hand, and I felt a numbing pain as if someone had whacked me on the funny bone with a sledge hammer. I ran back to some cover, while the enemy streamed past me jabbering like monkeys. The rest of the patrol seemed to have disappeared, and the chance of sailing into the retreating Boches with five rounds rapid was lost.

Then it occurred to me that there might be plenty more to come, in which case the patrol would be caught in an awkward predicament. I called to Private James to go and find Serjeant Brinsden, but received only moans in answer. To make things worse the fog chose to lift and thus revealed us to the enemy, not more than 20 yards away. Why they took no notice of us, I cannot conceive; I can only suppose that they were pre-occupied with their own safety. I went over to Private James to find him swearing like a good infantryman that he had been hit by an expanding bullet. His left arm was hanging by a thread from his shoulder, and, as only one shot was fired at us, I imagine that the bullet which hit me must have turned from my elbow and torn off his arm.

Without achieving our object, I collected the patrol and tried to trace our way back to "C" Company; but this was no easy job, and I was feeling terribly sick and shaken, and also was bleeding like a pig. So, I stopped and sat down for a bit while Corporal Hollyoake bound up my arm. The fog had come down again, and the Boches were shelling the road,



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while our guns were putting a few playful shots into Sapignies, in case we had not captured it. I had almost given up hope of ever finding "C" again when suddenly the fog lifted once more, to the tune of machine gun fire. The lift was sufficient, for I saw two men coming towards us, and recognised the ever faithful Midwinter. I told Bobby what I knew, and roughly where the Boches had come from, and the direction of their retreat, and then set off down the line, wasting no time in passing through the village as our guns were shelling it.

On the other side of the village I met Dick Warren of "B" Company, leading his platoon forward. God knows what had happened to his Company. I suppose they had lost themselves too. He told me that he thought he had got a nice blighty one, but that, to his sorrow, he had found that the machine gun bullet had merely taken the sole off his boot!

At the forward Aid Post a stretcher bearer had a look at my wound, and sorrowfully remarked that he did not think the artery was severed! Later, at the Regimental Aid Post, the Doctor confirmed his suspicions.

I was sorry to see the last of Midwinter, as I got into a horse-drawn ambulance. It seemed bad luck that he shouldn't be able to share my good luck. But orders are orders, and back he had to go. There was quite a hubbub at the Field Ambulance, near Courcelles. Somebody asked me where I had been hit, and when I said "in the elbow," he waxed rather wroth and wanted to know what part of the line. The one word, "Sapignies," seemed to have a magical effect, for the brass-hatted somebody popped off and came back with a still more brazen hat in tow, who, I believe, was our revered Corps Commander. Their faces were wreathed in smiles, like the cats', when I told them that the 52nd—with the accent on the 52nd—had captured the village at 4.30 a.m. It appeared that this infernal little village of ruins played a big part in their scheme of things.

They literally purred over the tidings, and I felt myself to be quite a hero, for I had never seen so many of the Staff before, and wondered where they had all come from. It seemed too close to the line!

In the afternoon, the motor ambulances took us down. I was allowed to sit in front, as a walking case. Back we went over familiar ground, over what had been No Man's Land—now a back area sporting a few heavies—through Douchy and Adinfer, crawling over the tracks deeply rutted by tractors and endless streams of ammunition lorries, and on to the Frévent road. Every bump made me wince, and the stretcher cases moan, but the driver kept on at a steady pace, unable to heed the groans and moans of all.



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The tents at the Casualty Clearing Station were provided with lovely beds and sheets; everything, in fact, that I had almost thought never to see again. A hot dinner, pyjamas, and bed; then a perfect angel of a nurse gave me an injection of morphia.

*R.J.N.N.* 10*th British Red Cross Hospital.*

*August 29th,* 1918. *Le Treport.*

I am getting on very well and have not yet been operated on. To-day I have been sitting outside in the garden in the sunshine, and am beginning to feel more like myself. Not being much of a hand at writing with my left hand, another officer is doing this for me. Best love.

*M.K.N. and B.H.A.N.*

*No.* 10. *British Red Cross Hospital.*

*September 2nd,* 1918. *Le Treport.*

I am very sorry to have kept you in the dark, but I have written a daily report to the Gov'nor, and I hope he has sent them on to you.

Are'nt I bad with my left hand! It was a miracle that I was not killed. Owing to the mist I ran into the Boche and got hit in the elbow. The bullet which got me became explosive and tore off the left arm of the man behind me.

"C" Company had taken it's objective, and I went to find "B," which ought to have been on our right, and get into touch with them. I had a handful of stout fellows with me. We shouted and whistled for "B." Then I distinctly heard a shout of "Here we are," and went through a hedge straight into a party of Boches about 40 yards away, and took this one in the elbow.

The pain has now become a dull ache, and all my fingers are dead, except the thumb and first. I shall be over in a day or two now. The Doctor has been keeping me to see if an operation is necessary.

I came down in the same train as Dick Warren. He had been hit through his helmet, which hung at the head of his cot with a huge hole blown out of the back of it.



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*R.J.N.N* *Salamanca Barracks.*

*April 3rd,* 1919. *Aldershot.*

The situation is very vague at present. I hope to get leave soon and come up and see you. No one knows much about this business. It was sickening missing you on Sunday. I got very peremptory orders to join the Depot on Saturday, and started that day. "Bingo" Baines came down here yesterday to join us. The War Office stopped him re-joining his regiment in France and ordered him to report here. Tyrwhitt-Drake and Dick Warren are here, and Rupert Brett and Guy Blewitt are due to join us soon, and 14 subalterns and four captains from the 52nd. We shall be a very happy family again.

The cadre of the 43rd is supposed to be turning up to-morrow from Mesopotamia. Colonel Marriott-Dodington, an old 52nd officer, is commanding us here.

*M.K.N.* *43rd Light Infantry.*

*April 3rd,* 1919. *Aldershot.*

I expect you have heard the news of my sudden retreat from Cork to this place. I was originally under orders to go to the Depot to take over the job of officer in charge of Documents and Records. I rang up Powell, the adjutant, and asked for leave to fetch the car before reporting, and was told by him that my job did not exist; that I had nothing whatever to do with him, and that my name had been submitted to join the 43rd. So, being a good soldier, I came down here on Monday.

We are under 48 hours notice to go abroad, but as there are no men, that is impossible. I expect we shall sail at the end of the month.

There are a good many familiar faces here. Dick Warren, who has gone on leave to-day, "Twitt" Drake, Titherington and "Bingo" Baines. I am feeling awfully bucked, because there is something afoot. All the Regular officers are being recalled from the ends of the country. Roger Ames and George Field may turn up at any moment. So, we shall be a very happy family when we all foregather. We are going to be brought up to war establishment, and naturally we are speculating on our ultimate destination. There are many possibilities; Archangel, Caucasia, Rumania, Egypt, Ukrainia, Siberia or Danzig. Personally, I think it is a toss up between Archangel and Rumania. However, don't get the breeze up; we may go nowhere which is far more likely; and in any case we probably won't know our destination till after we've sailed. We are obviously a mystery Brigade of Regulars which rather points to active service somewhere.



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*B.H.A.N.*

*April 4th*, 1919. *Salamanca Barracks.*

You will have seen by the papers that there is tremendous breeze up about the North Russian Expeditionary Force. Well, it is pretty certain, from all sources, that we are going out to reinforce or relieve this force, unless it is cut off in the meanwhile. It will probably mean a great deal of discomfort. I'm told that the mosquitoes in summer are awful; and it is more than likely that, as we shall be a small force, we shall be entirely forgotten!!

At present, there is no sign of my being able to get leave. We are all in the same boat; none of us has had leave, and we can't all go together. That we shall sail on May 1st seems almost certain, and therefore ten days at the outside is all that I can hope for.

As soon as I arrived, I was picked out to help to equip a Regimental Light Trench Mortar Battery; up till now training material has been unobtainable. We are going to start on Monday with a fortnight's intensive training, and five officers have got to join the class. As there are only three subalterns here, it looks as if we shall all have to attend and become experts. After that we shall have to train the men when we get some! I don't suppose that I shall command the battery; in any case I don't want to, if anyone else is inclined that way. But I was told that I should have to run it temporarily. I was detailed for no apparent reason, except for the fact that I am fairly senior as a subaltern, and that there are only six subalterns here, three of whom are on leave.

Sir Ernest Shackleton to-day says that three months' campaigning will break the Bolshies' back; after the same style as the first three months in 1914! And I rather wonder how he can know anything about it.

A bright spot is that "Bingo" Baines has joined us. He was to have gone back to France on Wednesday, but his return was cancelled and he reported here instead, full of spirits and optimism which made me glad I am going on this show. He went on leave the following day to get kit, and God knows when he will return!

By the way, a wire has been sent to the 52nd to send 14 subalterns and four captains. Guy Blewitt, Carter, Rupert Brett, Ballard, etc., have been wired for. All regulars are being recalled, and I wonder whether "Tiger" will turn up here soon. But there are no men at all, and what there are, are unfit for General Service. I cannot imagine where we are going to find the men to make the Regiment up to war strength. A machine gun regiment and a brigade of guns have been



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allotted to us and we are going out with the 67th (2nd) Hampshire Regiment. We are messing with the latter at present, because our own Barracks, Badajos, are already occupied! The 67th are better off for men than we are.

The inimitable "Twitt" Drake is here, in great form. He has only had 14 days' leave from Germany.

It is a pretty good shemozzle at the moment, but I expect we shall muddle through like the Naval Brigade at Antwerp and the 43rd at Kut-el-Amara. Colonel Marriott-Doddington is commanding us.

I cannot think of any more news. I hope to see you soon. Don't get the breeze up; the war ain't over yet; there's much to be done, and more wants doing!

*M.K.N.*

*April 9th,* 1919. *Aldershot.*

Circumstances and conditions change with remarkable rapidity. We are certainly living in what the papers call an epoch-making era! Here are we, changed from the honourable nomenclature of His Majesty's 43rd Regiment of Light Infantry, into No. 2 Composite Battalion of the 239th Brigade!! I arrived on Monday after a week-end at home to find this state of affairs.

The Regiment is finding the personnel for Headquarters and "A" Company, which "Bingo" commands. "B" Company will consist of Royal Warwicks, "C" Devons, and "D" Royal Berkshires.

Then, suddenly, last night, I was taken off the trench mortars and posted to "A" Company. Yesterday, equally suddenly, fourteen subalterns and one captain from the 52nd rolled up for duty and have all gone off on leave.

It is mortally dull down here doing orderly officer the whole time. So far from being sick at the idea of scrapping again, I'm all for it. I think there is a certain amount of satisfaction in it. The adventure of it is great fun, especially when surrounded by good friends. I might as well be fighting as doing anything else. War-time soldiering was peculiarly fascinating. Square-pushing bores me.

I love trapesing about the country, or the world where there is an element of risk and the possibility of excitement. I have had no orders, except from Powell, to come here; but now that I am here, I'm not going to quit. It is rather sickening to get done out of leave, but I suppose we shall be given a week-end when we come back in the autumn. I think the gods expect us to make one big attack and then they will pack us off home.



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I am going up to London to-morrow for the Bowyers' dinner and down again the same night. There always seems to be a pressing need for us to be here, and yet absolutely nothing to do when we are!

*R.J.N.N.*

*May 8th*, 1919. *Crowborough Camp.*

News, official and definite, has come at last. We sail on Monday the 12th, from Southampton, and I imagine that we shall go straight there from here, so that no one will know that we are going until we have gone.

We are being filled up with men of all sorts and regiments now. Men from practically every line regiment in the British Army have been sent to us.

Many thanks for your letter this morning, enclosing cuttings and my war gratuity form. I don't think this is going to be a strenuous show as far as fighting is concerned. We had a splendid lecture from a man who had just returned from Russia. He had been through four revolutions in Odessa. He gave us some awful descriptions of the atrocities committed, compared with which those of the Boches were child's play.

My address will be :—43rd Light Infantry,
North Russian Expeditionary Force.

*R.J.N.N.*

*Monday, May 12th*, 1919. *Noon. Train. Between York and Newcastle.*

Not long did my joy last in the news that I was to sail with the 43rd. On my arrival in camp after seeing you and Jane off from the station, I found that "Twitt" and I were to go via Newcastle. So, here I am and resigned to my fate. Anyway, I have "Twitt" and he's an excellent fellow; it is no use grousing over the inevitable.

We started last night, or rather this morning, at 1 a.m., and went straight through London. I was tired and slept till we reached Doncaster. There are three trains going to Newcastle, and this will be the last one to arrive.

I am glad I saw you yesterday; but I wish I hadn't had to stay at the station all the morning. I am glad to be going at last; it is going to be jolly good fun and I'll try to write frequently to you all. I think it would be very interesting in time to come if you were to keep my letters. I am going to try to keep up my diary. I should like to write a complete diary of my active service when I come home. But letters



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generally convey the feelings at the time better than a diary, and at greater length.

It is sickening to have to leave you again, but don't be anxious. This is my job, and I like it.

*R.J.N.N.*

*May 14th*, 1919. *At Sea. H.M.T. Czaritsa.*

I am writing this on deck out of the wind and in the glorious spring sunshine. A haze hangs over the horizon, the kind of haze you see at Pauling on a hot summer's day. There is no motion at all; it's as calm as a mill-pond at present, but the breeze anywhere but on the leeward side is chilly.

I will now try and describe to you our departure from Newcastle yesterday. For a long time before we pushed off, a crowd collected outside the gates and men and officers threw letters from the ship to the privileged few on the quayside to post after we had gone. Small boys fought for pennies thrown to them by the troops, scrambling for them like so many dogs after a bone. The gangway planks were raised at 12.30, and the tugs took us in tow. As the ship slid away from the quay, the crowd raised a cheer, the factory women showing great enthusiasm. The men struck up the well-known song, "Good-bye-ee." Do you know it?

Gradually we moved downstream, the crowd following as far as possible and waving farewell to the "Adventure." And the whole way down to the sea little collections of people in their gaudy colours ran from houses, wharves and yards to wave to us. Each cheer was answered by the troops, and the cries of "Are we downhearted?" from the banks were answered in ringing echoes of "No-o-o-o."

Soon we came to the world of shipyards. They were a marvel to me. Every conceivable kind of ship was being born in them. Here merely a keel, here a skeleton, there plates being rivetted, there a destroyer practically ready for the water. The whole aspect teemed with life. Cranes screeched and overhead rails roared on every side. In the river were ships of every country, and as we passed, they let off their sirens and whistles, producing the effect as of fleets and fleets of ships feeling their way through an inky fog. The high-pitched yells of the little tugs, the gutteral guffaws of the big colliers, and the klaxon horns whining up the scale to a heart-rending scream, seemed to blast the very firmament!

While every ship that had steam up saluted us in this manner, those that could not let off steam, lowered their ensign from the peak, and at each dip, our ensign was lowered. Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Greek ships all dipped their ensigns. It was curious to note the proportion of seafaring nations represented by those merchantmen.



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And so we came down to the sea, and a few people to bid us a last farewell ran to the lighthouse at the end of the mole and gave us a last cheer. We stood off at the mouth of the river and dropped anchor while a parade for boat stations was held, and the boats were lowered away clear of the deck.

We sailed this morning at 3.30 a.m. by your time, and 4.30 by our time, as we have put our watches forward one hour.

Our accommodation is somewhat scanty. Four of us, Tyrwhitt-Drake, Sawyer, Hamilton and I share a cabin about 6 feet by 6 feet. We each have a bunk and have to get up and go to bed in relays. I was made too big for this sort of thing! The food is excellent on board. We can have practically what we like, so there is no cause for complaint and we are happy in every sense of the word. All the same I wish I was with the others.

We are going through a minefield now, I believe; our paravanes are out on each side. If only the weather holds, we shall have a very enjoyable trip at the Government's expense.

*May 15th*, 1919. *Off the Shetlands.*

Yesterday evening we sighted land to port and I heard from someone that it was Dundee. There were many chimneys visible in the gloaming. I have had a very comfortable night, and this morning had a hot sea bath. Boat drill again after breakfast.

There was tremendous excitement this morning owing to a floating mine being sighted to port. I never saw it, but apparently shots were fired at it without success.

About midday, H.M.T. *Czar* was sighted and our captain dropped her a signal to come alongside. She altered her course and came within a mile or so and visual signals were exchanged. I believe she refused to be "matey"! She was too far away for us to be able to recognise anyone on board, but the 43rd is in her. She was making 17 knots to our 11, and so she will reach Archangel long before us. She is practically out of sight now, and she will gain two days on us at our present speed.

This morning we passed through a double minefield on each beam, and a naval officer pointed out Fair Island to me, an island north of the Orkneys, which was a famous lurking ground for Boche submarines. He said that any amount had been sunk hereabouts in their attempts to slip through to the Atlantic.



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The sea is still very calm; it's priceless sitting in the sun out of the wind. We occasionally pass little steamers southward bound, and the sight of them is very comforting. They give a feeling of companionship and society in this huge expanse of water. Ahead of us lies the deep blue of the north; behind us the dazzling dancing of the sun on the waves, making a sheet of silver cloth just like the silver tinsel which is the fashion for women's evening dresses nowadays.

*May 16th.* 1919.

*Course N.N.E* 200 *miles out from Newcastle.*

We passed the last of the Shetland Islands yesterday evening. They looked glorious in the glow of the sunset. I had no idea that they were so scattered and so small.

The wind is getting very chilly. I've just been forced below deck this very minute. The sun is lovely, but a great-coat is inadequate to keep out the wind. The sea is as calm as a mill-pond.

My appetite is splendid, and I seem to be able to sleep very well in spite of the restricted forms of exercise.

Most of the officers seem to play cards all day, from after breakfast to midnight and later. There are two rooms on the top deck which are perpetually filled with officers, cards and cigarette ends. Certain cliques monopolise the tables the whole time, so that no one else has a chance to get near them. They are a very mixed lot. The majority of the M.G.C. seem to be rankers. Then there are the trench mortar officers of the 239th Brigade and our details, as well as blue and green-tabbed gentlemen going out to continue their dangerous and arduous jobs of pen-pushing at the Base. These gentlemen, bedecked with many ribbons, rewards hardly won on the battlefield of St. James' Park, are always the most arrogant, having the least cause to be so, considering their active service. Doubtless, when they land they will explore new and virgin fields of decorations and fill up any empty gaps on their manly bosoms. Anyway, I don't mind betting that the troops who do the dirty work won't get a smell at a Russian decoration. There are also two Guards officers on board who have not the foggiest idea what they are going to do when they reach Archangel.

*May 17th,* 1919. *At Sea, 650 miles from Newcastle.*

The wind has dropped, so that it is quite comfortable to sit on deck where I am now. The atmosphere up here seems very clear, in fact unusually so, but that may be due to our latitude.



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I was playing bridge last night to the last rays of the setting sun and, to my astonishment, on looking at my watch, I found that it was midnight. It was still light enough to read a book. The sun goes right round the sky these days, and the glow in the sky never fades before the sun is up again.

The captain thinks that we will probably reach Archangel next Tuesday, the 20th. That will be about a week from leaving Newcastle. We ought to sight North Cape to-morrow morning.

The captain told me rather an amusing story last night:—Last summer a boat was crossing to North Russia manned by a Lascar crew, and, as it happened, it was the time of the feast of Ramadan, during which Mohamedans are not allowed to eat food until the sun has gone down. So, these wretched men sat on deck waiting and waiting for the set of the sun that would not set. The captain had to explain and prevail on them to eat! Rather an awkward religion to profess on a voyage into the Arctic Ocean!

*May* 18*th*, 1919. 1097 *miles from Newcastle.*

On getting up this morning, the weather had completely changed. There was a slight roll on the ship, and a cold mist enveloped the sea. I tried to sit on deck and read, but it was too chilly. The temperature of the water was 32 degrees, and the air about 40. The sun came out in spasms, but had no heat in it. I sat below, wrapped up in a blanket and read *Villette.*

Just before going to bed, I saw the coast of Lapland through a rift in the clouds, which were hanging low over the sea, the sea which up till now has been so calm and is now beginning to swell in black and forbidding rollers.

*May* 19*th*, 1919. 1366 *miles.*

The coast is very rocky; flat-topped mountains rise sheer out of the sea, capped with clouds like mantles. I suppose there are fjords running far into the mainland. The mountains are covered with snow, the air is chill, and a biting wind is blowing. The windows of this smoking room are glazed with ice flecks. It is freezing, and the sea has a black, fierce ice-cold look about it. We are truly in the Arctic Circle now.

Rumour has it that we shall reach Murmansk to-night or early to-morrow, where a good many officers have to disembark. We go on to Archangel.

I wish the dear old sun would come out and cheer us up a bit.



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*May 20th*, 1919. *Murmansk.*

We have arrived at Murmansk. It is not a prepossessing looking place, composed of a few shacks, etc. The air is very keen, but the sun is shining, and we don't feel the cold though the country is clothed in snow. Someone told us it was an English summer!

We are to stay here about five days, because Archangel is still frozen in.

The *Czar*, with the 43rd on board, is lying further up the roadstead and there are a number of ships in this fine natural harbour, including men-o'-war. I am writing this part hurriedly because H.M.S. *Glory* is sailing for England and is taking mails, so that you ought to receive this in a week's time.

I don't think we shall be allowed ashore, which is a pity. We shall get so fed up with this boat. But I have hopes of going aboard the *Czar* and seeing the Regiment.

I wish you could see this place. We are shut in on every side by white hills and, in the distance, are the masts of merchantmen and transports; to the left of the latter, the smoke of Murmansk is rising in the crystal air. There must be a frost though I do not feel cold.

Yesterday the weather was distinctly on the rough side; a heavy roll from stern to bow caused by a three-quarter wind. Whales and seals were spotted by sharper eyes than mine. I found it too cold to be comfortable on deck.

I had better conclude this series of my diary. Write as often as you can. Letters will be more important here than ever they were in France. Thus begins my second adventure.

*R.J.N.N.*

*May 20th*, 1919. *Murmansk.*

Feeling fearfully bored after lunch I went to the ship's side to watch a tug come alongside. Not long afterwards I saw a small dinghy coming towards us and noticed the Regiment's badge among the occupants. This minute boat contained "Bingo" Baines, Toby Sturges, Giles, Booth, Guy Sturges and a pal of Guy's. As all of them were wearing greatcoats you can realise that there was very little superfluous space aboard her! I got my coat and roused Tom Drake and Sawyer and went aboard the tug which was still alongside. Guy made his dinghy fast to the tug and we set off to the *Czar*. It was good to get off the *Czaritsa* on to different ground, though the two ships, being sisters, are practically identical. "Bingo" B gave us dinner, and we played a game of poker after. I found out that there was really plenty of accommodation



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for our details in the *Czar,* and that N.C.O.'s occupy the corresponding cabins to ours in the *Czaritsa.* So there was no earthly reason why we should have been separated for the voyage. "Bingo" B told me that the Padre had been detailed to sail with the details in the *Czaritsa,* but had complained that the *Czar* could not possibly go to sea without its spiritual adviser!

We had a great time getting into the dinghy. There was a drop of six feet from the companion ladder, attached to which was a rope ladder which proved more of a hindrance than a help. Those in the *Czar* had much the best of it, laughing at us struggling in mid air.

*May 21st.*

Booth, Toby and Guy Sturges lunched with us. Then we went off for a sail in the dinghy. There was a fresh wind blowing but, having no centre board, we drifted a lot.

The harbour is really the mouth of the river Kola which is about three miles wide here. If only we had a centre-board dinghy or a boat like the *Anglia,* what marvellous sailing we could have!

As it never gets dark up here, it is very hard to know the time; you cannot rely on the sun.

We came back to a high tea on board Guy's ship, the *War Anglian,* an oiler which has his little motor launch stowed on deck. Later a tug took us ashore to go to the concert party in Murmansk.

I am glad I have seen Murmansk, but I never want to see the place again. It is merely a small village composed of log huts, each one of which is surrounded and enclosed by a filthy smell. I don't think I have ever experienced such a mephitis as emanated from these compounds, not even in the back streets of Rouen on a hot day.

The Russians are a fearsome people to behold; dark, scowling, bearded scoundrels in fur caps, long boots and filthy jackets or coats. I thought Paris was a cosmopolitan place, yet in this weird cantonment there were British, Americans, Serbs, French, Russians, Chinese, Italians and Finns, etc. The ground is black or grey sand, and evil-smelling mud. It's really indescribable. During the winter months the inhabitants throw all their refuse and sewage out of the window, where it remains in the snow and preserved from putrefaction by the frost until the thaw comes. The thaw has come and the tracks are runnels of liquid sewage. Lovely!

Our Sappers have erected great sidings and landing stages, and in fact transmogrified the place from a fishing village into a port of some size. I heartily sympathize with



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these poor devils who have stayed here all through the winter with only one hour of light in twenty-four.

*May 23rd*, 1919.

A really warm spring day with bright sun and a light breeze. Toby, Tom Drake, Guy and I sailed to the left bank of the river and landed. Every little creek and gully is a roaring torrent of melted snow from the hills behind. The ground was very soggy and thick with bilberries which stained my breeches like red ink.

After lunch on board the *Czar*, we pulled to the shore and set off through the main street (!) of Murmansk to the field cashier. We went into a better bit of the village than last time wherein the small boys proved a curse. I must certainly learn the Russian for "Buzz off." The Russians are of all types; some evidently of the old régime, very smart and heavily be-medalled. It was a much more interesting visit this time, though the smells have increased!

*May 24th*, 1919.

We are sailing in line ahead for Archangel, having weighed anchor early this morning. The ice breaker, *Sviatogor*, is leading followed by *Stephen*, *Menominee*, another ice breaker, name unknown, *Czar*, and *Czaritsa*. We are sailing very slowly at the pace of the leader. We are now on a S.E. course and about to enter the White Sea. The Murman coast lies on our starboard beam, snow-capped and misty, but delightful to look upon.

The rumour prevails that the temperature at Archangel is 90 degrees and that mosquitoes already abound!

We have had wild rumours that the Boche has refused to sign the Peace Treaty, and that Foch is advancing into Germany. Also that our fleet had smashed up the Bolo in the Baltic and other good news.

*May 25th*, 1919. *White Sea.*

I woke up this morning to the sound of ice scraping along the side of the ship, a very weird noise. I sat on deck after breakfast. It took some time for my eyes to get used to the terrific glare of the sun off the ice. As far as you could see there was ice sparkling and glinting in the sunlight.

It was very thrilling to watch this old tub crunching her way through in the wake of the icebreaker ahead. I don't quite know what I expected to see up here; I certainly did not think that the ice would be so rough and jagged. I suppose it has been heaped up into bergs by tremendous pressure from all sides.



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Now and again we passed circular blocks of ice in the centre of which were pools of water of the most heavenly tint of blue, not quite opal, lighter and more limpid than ultramarine, a colour created by sunlight on water resting on the ice. It seemed to be the colour of the sky on a very hot day when you can scarcely recognise it as blue and yet it is blue.

My eyes are aching now from having been sitting in that glorious brilliance all the morning. The ship has just been painted, the superstructure white and the funnels red. Yet after the dazzle of the ice the white paint looked a dirty grey and the funnels a dull orange. Men's faces appeared to be dark and tanned and my hands seemed a jaundice yellow.

We have passed only one sign of habitation, and that was a big house on the cliffs with a tall tower. I pity the people who live in that desolate spot.

We are now in open water again, having negotiated the first belt of ice at midday. I can see two transports on the horizon still stuck in the ice. I fancy that this ice which we've just passed is "pack," floating down to the open sea.

Apparently we shall reach Archangel to-night or early to-morrow, though it is inaccurate to use the word "night." It never gets as dark as an English summer twilight. The wireless news from Archangel seems good. The Russian troops seem to be doing well on the Vaga river, and, from all accounts, the Russian Army is swelling in numbers. Admiral Koltchak is advancing too, so that with luck we shall be able to hand over the line to the Russians, and return home before the winter if we do not advance on Petrograd.

*R.J.N.N.*

*May 26th,* 1919.

We are now sailing among the islands which lie in the delta of the Dvina. The sea is calm and the sun as hot as you can wish. We passed through two more ice belts yesterday afternoon.

I went to bed at midnight, just as the sun was setting in a sheet of purple and saffron spread right across the northern sky. Never have I seen such glorious tints of colour as were reflected on the ice, the most delicate shades of pink mingling into deeper and yet deeper purple, until they became azure and black. I can't describe it. I leant over the rail and wondered, absolutely amazed by the beauty of the sea and the colours reflected. It really was something to write home about!

The transports *Czar* and *Stephen* have gone up to Archangel already. I don't expect we shall disembark to-day. The first phase of the adventure is over, and I shall be glad to get ashore. I'm beginning to suffer from lack of exercise, and the cabin is so stuffy that I cannot sleep at night.



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*Later.* *Archangel.*

I went ashore after dinner with " Twitt " to visit the *Czar*. We had a long and hot walk over tracks inches deep in dust, the foundation of which consists of cobbles thrown down anyhow. We walked down the main street dressed with flags in our honour. It is a more civilised place than Murmansk. There are even brick buildings (most of which are churches) painted white with pretty coloured roofs, either green, brick red pink or vermilion. The churches all have a weird series of minarets painted with stars and a huge cross sits on top of each.

There was a paragraph in the Russian evening paper written in English welcoming us as saviours. To the Russians we seem to be little tin gods.

We found our way to the quay where the *Czar* was berthed ; all the world was there. Russians, and in fact every kind of ally were shouting and waving handkerchiefs to the troops on board, who in their turn, threw to the crowd English pennies, their shoulder titles, cap badges and anything handy. There seemed to be a howling mob both on the boat and quay.

*May 27th,* 1919.

Tom Drake received orders last night for the details to join the 43rd at Olga Barracks. The whole Brigade, consisting of the 43rd, 67th, 8th Machine Gun Regiment, Sappers and Gunners are going to receive an official welcome from General Ironside, and the Russian Government here. We, being supernumerary, are not going to be present at the function.

We had lunch in the ship, and then walked to the barracks which, of course, were right at the other end of the town which stretches some four miles along the river bank.

Apparently the triumphal march past was very tedious, owing to the incredibly bad state of the road. General Grogan, V.C., our Brigadier, had to eat bread and salt, which is the Russian proof of a hearty welcome.

In the evening we were allowed out of barracks, so Toby and I went into the town to see the sights. We took a tram down the Troitsky Prospekt, the main street of unending length. The tram proved to be a mephitis on four wheels ! The odour seemed to be a mixture of dead men and putrefying fried fish !

First of all we tried to find the officers' club, but failed. There are many men in khaki but, on questioning them, they only purr and spit at you in Russian. So we strolled into the Cathedral. There was a service going on and the place was semi-dark and reeked of incense. On each side of the



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porch were many candles burning in front of ikons. The faces of the pictures struck me as good but, to prevent erosion from continual kissing by devotees, the designs of these pictures were executed in silver or gilt, while the hands and faces alone were portrayed in the original paint. The result was that each one on examination looked tawdry, cheap, and gimcrack and yet there was a certain magnificence in the general effect. The congregation was standing up; indeed, there were no seats to be seen! A couple of priests were moaning a Litany, while the people bowed and crossed themselves continually. To me it seemed a bobbing and crossing competition!

We waited till the end of the service, and then a side-show started immediately in a lady chapel. More moaning, more censer swinging!

It was interesting to watch the congregation coming out. They went up to the ikons, bowed and crossed themselves three times, kissed their particular saint's picture, knelt and kissed the stone floor, bobbed and crossed three times and then walked out bobbing as they went. Some idolatry, thought I.

A verger showed us round the Church. We mounted to the summer Church on the first floor where the walls were decorated with paintings of the wicked being thrown into the jaws of hell by Satan and his stokers. We saw the priests' robes which must have numbered three figures, all richly and beautifully embroidered.

I find that my kit has been rifled and a pair of new shoes stolen. "Fritz" Eagle has had three pounds of tobacco and all his soap pinched. Toby one pair of boots and Booth all his shaving tackle. Soap is 4/- a cake here! I think our kits must have been rifled at Southampton. I don't know what I should do with the perpetrators of this theft, but if it was in my power they would never have hands to thieve again!

Toby met a man who was at Radley with him. He is a V.C. in the King's, and at the moment adjutant of a battalion of Bolshevik prisoners. We are training these men and have given them their liberty on condition that they fight for us.

*May 28th,* 1919.

The weather is cold, windy and wet. The Company has spent the morning unloading the Regiment's stores from a barge just outside the mess. Our rations are very bad and small. We were told in England that they would be good and plentiful. Whom and what is one to believe?

Four of us went to a fur shop and looked at some skins, reindeer, marten, red fox, astrakhan, polar bear, mink, grey squirrel and many others. The prices were very heavy. A red fox cost 450 roubles, i.e. £5.



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*May 29th*, 1919.

General Ironside came to inspect us this morning. He is a huge man, as broad as I am long almost! He spoke to the men about prestige, saying that he had to deal with so many nationalities that if we did not behave well, he could not twist their tails; that they all look to us for an example.

Then he spoke to the officers alone, and told us that he had had to send two colonels home for being drunk and other officers for bartering rations and making money out of the Russian peasants. He hoped we would be back by the end of the summer, and gave us some details of the hardships which the men had suffered through the winter.

The advance party goes off to-morrow, and we go on June 2nd in a barge. It's a lovely day to-day. The trees are just beginning to come out.

*R.J.N.N.*

*May 29th*, 1919. *Archangel.*

I have sent off my diary, and I am wondering if it isn't most awfully dull to read. It is very hard to know what to write about. I am feeling very fit, though some marching would do me good. All the same that is not much fun on these roads, which are roads only in name. I know nothing of the outside world. We occasionally get some news in the wireless press about an internal combustion engine or some equally important thing! I have heard nothing of the Peace Conference.

General Ironside came to speak to the men to-day. I don't know whether I mentioned this in my last letter. Anyway, he said that his authority and command depended much on us. To the officers he spoke privately about drink and said that certain British officers by their conduct had prevented him from putting the twist on some American officers. The latter and their men are insufferable; they can neither fight from all accounts nor can they behave, but that is nothing new in their history! They are also riddled with disease and in three words, no b—y good; Ironside is therefore going to get rid of them as being more of a hindrance than a help. How they would like to know that, the bounders! The French and Italians are poor stuff, and he told us that a C 3 British battalion had done the best work!!

The other thing he warned us against was bartering. Here again the Americans have been swindling the simple Russians. The proper exchange for £1 is 40 English roubles, or 77 old roubles. The Yanks have exchanged £1 for 120 old



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roubles and then exchanged the latter for sterling. The Russians know that £ is worth more than any of their roubles and the Yanks have been trading on their simplicity. They would!

Ironside is a terrific man, standing about 6 feet 5 inches, and well covered withal! A fine specimen to represent us out here. He can speak three languages fluently, and get on well in five others. He spent seven years in the Boche Army, too!

After lunch, the Commanding Officer told us that invitations for 42 officers had been received from the Mayor to go to an "honourable tea" at the Duma, as a welcome to the "Brave British Volunteers." There was a terrific crush. All the Russian sparks were there, resplendent in their old time uniforms and covered with the orders of the Tsarist régime. The Mayor's speech was interpreted to us and then the orchestra played our National Anthem three times! No one seemed to know the words of the second and third verses.

The tea was wonderful; sugared cakes and all kinds of delicacies as well as pucka Russian tea, weak, slightly sugared without milk, and flavoured with lemon. It was excellent.

The Russian officers, who were not wearing khaki, looked very fine. There was one old General, bald and bearded, who wore a drab jacket with the stars of orders plastered all over him, bright blue trousers, with a thick red stripe, knee boots and jack spurs. I was told that he was General Savitch, who was, at one time, Chief of Staff to General Brusiloff. He certainly was an imposing old man.

There is one Russian General up here who cannot join the forces, because his family is under surveillance in Petrograd, and if the Bolos heard that he was fighting, his family would be murdered. So he trains recruits, with the rank of ensign.

The Mayor, in his speech, hoped that all the Russias would be united under one crown; in fact, they seem to want a limited monarchy like ours.

Such a welcome, such a display of enthusiasm, hospitality, comradeship, and hopefulness I have never seen before. The loyal Russians seem to imagine that, with our arrival, they can begin to hold their heads clear of the flood; they have such confidence in us. As General Ironside said, "they think that the Englishman is the model of what a man should be." It is up to us to maintain that opinion. I was touched by the ceremony. If England can save Russia and put her on her feet again, she will have done a noble thing.

Bridge in the evening and, as Sam Pepys says, 'and so to bed.' I am greatly enjoying his diary.



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*May 30th*, 1919.

I was chosen on account of my height to represent the 43rd on an American Memorial Parade. Major Carter, 43rd, Captain Meade, 43rd, and a Captain of the Devons were also detailed.

I had a party of 10 men to march to the Sabornaya Quay, the point of assembly for the march. As we were representing the 43rd I told the men that we would march at the trail and not at the slope. A Major in the Warwicks heard me give the order and told me that the heavy infantrymen were always to do their own drill. I had some words with him, saying that we were representing light infantry. It does make me wild that we should be called the 43rd and yet not be able to do our own drill. Carter saw that I was fuming with rage and mollified me by remarking that these heavy wallahs can only do their own drill while a light infantryman can do all drill. But what, I wonder, would Sir William Napier say if he saw us on the line of march!! It is a detail, I know, yet one that makes me damned angry. Crosse would shudder to see it and probably rave!!

Well, we had a long march over a bad road. The parade was very cosmopolitan. The Americans led, followed by a detachment of their Navy; next came the Russian Army and Navy; R.N. followed by detachments of the 67th and 43rd, French soldiers and sailors, Italian soldiers, and lastly Poles. It was curious to note that of all the nations represented, England alone gives her Navy precedence.

We retraced our steps back to the cemetery, and there I found out why the parade had been ordered. This is the day on which the Yanks commemorate the fallen in the Civil War. The American C-in-C spoke about the American dead up here, followed by General Miller the Russian C-in-C, General Ironside, and lastly the American Consul. The only beautiful part about the ceremony was the trumpet sounding the "Last Post." The clearness and the tone of the unfamiliar call were beyond reproach. Otherwise, I was hopelessly bored.

*May 31st*, 1919.

I went to a lecture on the fighting on the Dvina and Vaga. The Colonel who lectured was full of dry humour and gave us a vivid account of the first days. He was in command of a mixed force of 60 Marines, 70 French, 70 Poles, and about 100 Russians, roughly 300 men. They called themselves the "Buccaneers," and, by his account, they were. The amount of work he did was marvellous. The only reinforcements he received were three companies of Royal Scots.



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*June 1st*, 1919.

Grogan's Brigade paraded to celebrate the King's Birthday. We shall not be here for the proper anniversary. We marched to the Sabornaya Quay again and formed up round the Cathedral. The Parade was made the occasion for the presentation of colours to the Slavo-British Legion which is commanded by an English colonel, with four captains and eight subalterns, on the lines of the Indian Army.

There was a service in the Cathedral, after which the colours were carried to the saluting base followed by sundry priests in yellow robes. One of the latter wore a crown and another a velvet top hat!

The S.B.L. marched in their queer slow time, and received the colours, were inspected by General Miller, the Russian C-in-C, and gave him the salute. This is done thus:—the troops come to the "present" and as the inspecting General passes, the captain says something which the men answer at the top of their voices in unison. I don't know what they say; it sounds very weird.

After the inspection they marched past, followed by the R.N. and Grogan's Brigade led by the 67th. It was a grilling day and marching back to barracks was a "percy" job. The march past was well done; you may see me leading No. 1 Platoon on the Cinema. There were many cameras operating. Look out for me.

*June 2nd*, 1919.

We are moving up the river to-morrow in tugs, so the morning was spent in packing kits and valises. After lunch a very sad thing happened. Our Quartermaster blew his brains out with a revolver, having gone mad with overwork. The Staff arrangements were conspicuous by their absence. Not even transport was available, unless fetched personally, and poor old Dancey who has done nothing except arrange for moves ever since he rejoined us at Crowborough, just went off his head. Dick Warren has taken over the job pro tem. The tragedy gave us all a nasty shock. He was such a cheery, good-hearted fellow and an ideal man at his job.

Tyrwhitt-Drake, Meade and I sent a wire to Eton for the Fourth of June. I hope my Latin was all right. I put it thus:—"Tres Etonenses in septentrionalibus Russiae partibus te salutant." I hope it will arrive all right.

*June 3rd*, 1919. *Tug "Soochonets."*

We marched off in full marching order to the Sabornaya Quay, where we embarked on our tugs. Toby and I are in this old paddle boat which is just big enough to take the



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Company cooker. We stopped some time at Bakharitsa to pick up some Ordnance Stores for the line.

The fleet comprises 14 tugs and launches, the decks of which are stacked with wood fuel. Tea was the first meal we had in the cabin which is quite comfortable, though I have my doubts about its cleanliness. We found that our meal clashed with the skipper's and engineer's who wanted us to eat some weird looking pink stuff which I thought was salmon. Needless to say, we refused.

The skipper and crew are filthy, greasy, unshaven Bolos who look as if they washed only on Christmas Day. Toby's cap was lying on the seat and to our dismay, the skipper took it up and looked at the badge. Would he try it on? No sooner had we said that, than the filthy brute crammed it on his head before we had time to snatch it away. I shrieked with laughter at T's discomfiture!

It got a bit chilly in the evening and overcast, but the sunset on the living green, so fresh and cool, and on the brown cliffs of the river, was a sight to feast the eyes on. The spring has only just begun, the leaves are fresh and the grass so green. The country is either flat or slightly undulating, dotted with many villages along the river bank, many more than I ever expected to see in these parts. The river is wide and very shallow in places, while the banks are sometimes steep, high and frowning, sometimes sandy like a seashore. Up till now the river has proved very broad and the colour of the Spey in spate. Forest abounds on each bank between the villages, and the larches look very beautiful in their spring dress of crimson tufts.

Each village has it's square church painted in different colours and towered with minarets bespangled with stars and crosses; round it are little plots of cultivated land and grazing cattle. The rivage is generally stacked with timber.

Later on in the evening clouds began to gather and a thin drizzle fell. An icy wind, too, began to blow from the north. At 11.30 p.m. we moored with the rest of the fleet, which had arrived an hour and a half before us. They were all bivouacked on the soft grass, and we had to go ashore too, though we were all quite comfy on board. I heaved out my flea-bag and blankets and crawled inside. The ground was as soft as a feather bed. Overhead sea gulls were calling and skirling, and that was the music by which I was lulled to sleep.

*June 4th,* 1919. *Floreat Etona.*

I woke up to feel rain spickling on my face, but being sleepy at that moment I did not care if it snowed ink. It rained harder. I turned away from the wind. At rouse, 6 a.m., I



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realised how wet it was. My greatcoat kept it off from above, but my jacket as pillow was soaked. Thus the two garments I wanted most were wettest. But once on board I dried my coats on the boiler and had some breakfast. The wind was ice-cold, and I felt miserable, but not so much so that I couldn't laugh. The most miserable conditions are the funniest. It is only when one is living in the lap of luxury that one remembers how to grouse. When everything is of the best, the slightest hitch causes annoyance ; sheer misery raises the laugh and inspires the wit of the private soldier. Certainly on active service and under filthy conditions a private soldier is at his best. He is then inimitable, grumbling good-naturedly. He is priceless and admirable. There is no word to suit him, but he's just IT with a very large I.

We pushed off and sailed for about two hours and then moored again for necessary functions because there are no latrines on the boats. The day had changed completely. The sun was shining brightly, and though the wind was still cold, we all felt in the pink again.

Not long after we had started off a very funny thing happened ; the skipper was feeding and another of the crew at the wheel. We suddenly found ourselves heading straight for the shore. The helmsman lost his head, and left the wheel to call the skipper. The troops shrieked with mirth, and the volley of Russian expletives and invective which ensued from the captain was almost more amusing than the actual display of seamanship. The men talk the most imitative Russian nonsense. It sounds like the genuine article to my ears. " Buzzoffsky Trotsky " is a favourite expression, and, of course, every Russky is called either Lenin, Trotsky or Bolo ! Anyway we managed to get off the sandbank all right, after much bad language.

At 5 p.m. we stopped to refuel, just as the remainder of the fleet was starting off again. We took two hours to load with wood and so Toby and I wandered off to the village where, with the aid of a few cigarettes and fewer Russian words, we managed to buy some butter and eggs. The peasants are very picturesque in their embroidered smocks.

The afternoon was hot, but the windows of the shacks we visited were all shut tight. The ceilings too were so low that neither Toby nor I could stand up straight in the living rooms. We found it more pleasant to stand outside in the sun than enter these rooms permeated with the odour of unwashed, sweating humanity combined with the stench of live stock !

I watched a woodman chopping logs, and noticed the way he split them. It was very neat, and I must show you the trick when I'm next at Sloley.



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In the fields between the river and village we passed a weird circle of peasants talking at the top of their voices simultaneously! I presume they were holding a soviet!

We are now speeding to our bivouac ground, five hours behind the rest of the fleet; so I expect we shall sleep on board.

*June 5th*, 1919. *Osinova Camp. Beresnik.*

Slept on board. I went out for a walk on the river bank at 6 a.m. in the glorious sunlight. We moved off at 7 a.m., and arrived here at 10 p.m. Then we had to unload the baggage and get the cookers ashore. A very efficient sailor superintended this job and took the responsibility off our shoulders. Under his directions the gangway planks were made fast and we coaxed the wheels of the cooker on to them with some difficulty. The sailor shouted, "Now then, let her go with a run." We did. Smash!! the cooker's wheels crashed through the joints of the planking where no one seemed to know that joints existed, and settled down like a battleship in the water! The sailor was rather discomfited, but we just laughed like fools.

We are supposed to be going into the front line to-morrow, but, personally, I don't think it likely, because there is too much kit to be loaded and the line is too far off. However, the sooner we are 'in' the better.

*June 6th.*

After pushing four recalcitrant cookers up a gangway, inclining at an angle of 45 degrees on to a Noah's ark, loading and stowing all the Quartermaster's stores, S.A.A., trench mortar bombs and sundry other impedimenta, we got under weigh at 2 p.m. The current of the river and the head wind were such that we made little progress for about an hour. Then we turned off to the right up the Vaga which is very, very low and much narrower than the Dvina. The spits of sand and shingle running out into midstream remind me of a Scottish river.

We put to shore at 6 p.m. at Ust Vaga and were told that there were no orders for us; that we should probably bivouac for the night, and go up to the line at Mala Beresnik by boat in the morning.

We lolled about for two hours and then, suddenly, an order came to say that we were to move up by barge at 10 p.m. Forthwith the job of unloading began again. Ammunition, kit bags, cookers, all had to go ashore! To help matters mos-



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quitoes—the first we had encountered—appeared to take their evening meal.

In the middle of the unloading, an order came cancelling the movement by barge owing to the fact that the barge provided for our transport drew more water than the river contains.

That, of course, is typical of the Staff.

So, at 11.30 p.m. we started off to march the distance of seven miles as calculated by the selfsame Staff. As soon as we quitted the village of Ust Vaga we entered the forest and never emerged until we reached Mala Beresnik. The track was sandy and rough ; we were dead beat from the exertions of loading and unloading the ark and then reloading on to drosky carts ; the mosquitoes were damnable. At every halt they buzzed round us as thick as a swarm of ants. Precautions had to be taken since the forest on each side could well conceal a hostile patrol, a whole army, anything in fact. The atmosphere was stuffy, hemmed in as we were by the everlasting forest. The track ahead never altered—a rise—a fall —another rise—and so on interminably. To pull the head net over my face so obstructed my view that it would have been impossible to spot anything untoward ahead, and also the asphyxiation underneath precluded its use. At the halts I could pull it down, but even then swarms of mosquitoes found their way through the meshes where the net was tucked into the jacket collar. Through the seams of my breeches and the lacing holes they found room for the insertion of their proboscides. They settled like hairs on the back of my hands and crawled up my sleeves and inside my shirt. Added to this torture, there was the maddening wheezing hum of the little fiends, and the sudden, intensified scream as one or more settled in my ears and buzzed out again. The very ether was plagued with a plethora of poisonous parasites.

The seven miles spun out and yet no sign of Mala Beresnik. The men were tired and nearly mad with irritation, while all sense of precaution was dulled by the torture. Our mouths were parched from the sand, heat, and innumerable cigarettes and pipes, the smoke from which did keep away a few of the winged devils.

At last, after four hours of unmitigated purgatory—a march that I for one shall remember to my dying day—the column reached the front line, and at 5 a.m. the gallant 2/10 Royal Scots marched out for home. Though our welcome at Archangel had been cordial, it was nothing to compare with our reception from these Lowland crocks who had been counting the hours to our arrival. Their unfeigned delight at the sight of us was the sole consolation for the pestilential forest march.



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*June 7th*, 1919. *Mala Beresnik.*

Our defences are good—much better than I expected—forming a semi-circle with the river as diameter. On the other side of the river is a big expanse of burnt forest known as the Brown Patch, which is neutral or No Man's Land. Having no command of my own, I accompanied "Bingo" B right round the area just as the sun was getting hot. From 6 a.m. till 4 p.m. it is simply grilling though the mosquitoes are least voracious during these hours.

Our centre and left face are composed of trenches, with very strong machine gun nests and dug-outs, commanding all lines of approach. Our right face is defended by a line of blockhouses connected with wire, well concealed in the forest and commanding broad rides. We are covered by Russian gunners who are a very stout lot.

On arrival we found very little accommodation for officers, because the Royal Scots had three where we have eight. We managed to feed at Canadian Village, a collection of shacks behind the blockhouses used by the Royal Scots as Forward Area Headquarters. In the evening, when it was cooler we manhandled our kits over to a shack in the middle of the village where we have established our Company Headquarters. It is the only shack still standing, the others having been burnt at some time, and it occupies an exposed and unprotected position on rising ground. But there is nowhere else for us to go, as Carter has occupied Canadian Village as Forward Area Commander. He told "Bingo" B to hang on when the latter reported that Company Headquarters were in Chateau Rickety, which we have nicknamed this shack.

By the time I had got my kit across I was absolutely dead beat, so I rigged up my mosquito net and slept on the grass. Sawyer had omitted to bring a net and was eaten alive and had to find another pitch indoors! But I slept quite well and immune from the attacks of mosquitoes.

The vegetation in the forest is simply lovely. The silver birches are just in leaf; guelder roses and syringas are bursting into flower, while sheets of golden anemones carpet the mossy banks and undergrowth. If it wasn't for the excessive heat and the mosquitoes we should have nothing to complain about.

*R.J.N.N.*

*June 9th*, 1919. *Mala Beresnik.*

We had our first casualty this morning. A machine gun opened fire from the other side of the river on to the Pimple



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and Banya posts and hit a man of No. 1 Platoon in the groin. Nothing serious.

The mess is very comfortable now, and owns a kitchen in the next room which was cleaned out under " Bingo's " supervision. He always had the reputation of being the king of cleanliness in France.

The Bolo became quite interesting after lunch and landed four whizzbangs within the perimeter, only two of which exploded !

*June 10th,* 1919.

Reconnoitred the ground in front of Scott's Hill post through my glasses with a view to taking out a patrol to-night to try and snaffle the Bolos who fired on this post yesterday and early this morning. For the purposes of this patrol we dispensed with head nets and smeared our faces and necks with the bad margarine from the rations, mixed with rifle oil. It proved fairly efficacious in discouraging the mosquitoes, but the smell was revolting !

We went out at about 10.45 p.m., and patrolled along the river bank, and then turned right handed over streams, through swamps of spongy moss and water up to our knees, to the higher ground in front of the Bolo position. Here I halted the men and we lay in wait. The buzzing of the gnats prevented me from using my ears and we could go no closer without being seen. I crawled forward a bit and watched the enemy's front line, but devil a soul could I see.

*June 11th,* 1919.

The Bolos started shelling after lunch, dropping them all over the position. A dud landed at " Bingo's " feet just outside the shack ! The net result was a certain amount of wind up that they were going to attack.

*June 12th,* 1919.

The wind has subsided. The Bolo fired on our position in the Summer House. Philip Booth and I went out in the evening to the " Lone Birch " from which the Bolos fired on the post, and found a splendid position covering No. 2 Bridge which lies halfway across No Man's Land. Whichever side reaches this spot first commands the other's trenches. We now have a Lewis gun trained on " Lone Birch."

Holt has gone sick, and I have taken over No. 1 Platoon for which I am truly thankful as I have a command at last.



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*June 13th*, 1919.

Duty from 2 a.m. till 5 a.m. The morning was very cold and wet. I felt very miserable. Started at the blockhouse end of the perimeter and worked round by Fort Garry, Horseshoe, Pimple, Banya, Summer House, Coswick, to Scott's Hill posts. I took out a Lewis gun team from the latter to ambush the Bolos at "Lone Birch," but with the usual lack of success. We don't seem to be very good at effecting a meeting!

*June 14th*, 1919.

The First Mail. Red Letter Day.

*R.J.N.N.* *Chateau Rickety.*

*June 20th*, 1919. *Mala Beresnik.*

The mail was wonderful and I have two letters to thank you for. I sent off my diary just as the mail arrived, so I will continue now.

*June 15th*, 1919.

The weather is cold, wet, and cheerless. One would hardly think that two days ago we were sweltering in the heat. The gnats, however, have sought shelter and that is a blessing.

It is a dull life; nothing happens and I should be bored flat if it were not for the splendid crowd of officers in the mess. The Company is now composed of "Bingo" Baines, Naylor who was a prisoner in Kut, Toby Sturges, William Giles, Philip Booth, "Bolo" Lowndes and Sawyer lately from Sandhurst.

To-day William made a wonderful patrol up to the Bolo lines. He spotted a sentry in a post and went forward with five men to try and snaffle him. The sentry spotted them and two machine guns and a rifle post opened fire, but never touched one! That shows what their shooting is like.

*June 16th*, 1919. *Canadian Village.*

We changed our Headquarters from the old shack to this better one behind the line of blockhouses. It is much more comfortable. Regimental Headquarters have moved from Ust Vaga to Seltso on the right bank and Carter has left this place in "Bingo's" command.

I took out a standing patrol to try and ambush the Bolos who fire so impudently on our southern posts. No luck! They must have known that we were there.



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*June 17th*, 1919.

A Bolo came and gave himself up this morning. Our sentry fired at him until he waved a white handkerchief. Apparently he knew a good bit about the Bolo position and told our interpreter where the guns were. This poor devil had been forced into the army under the Bolo conscription scheme, and had actually been in uniform only three days before deserting. His rations were pretty poor, and on arrival at our Company Headquarters, he ate a huge breakfast, consisting of two canteens of tea, six biscuits, three rashers of bacon and would have eaten more had he had the chance.

*B.H.A.N.*

*Waterloo Day.*

Philip Booth and I are the only two of the Company left in the line. The others were relieved by "C" Company today, but our reliefs have not arrived yet from Ust Vaga, 12 miles downstream. The boat which was to have brought them here has been commandeered by Brigade to go to the Dvina front where a battle is taking place.

The whole relief is a damned nuisance because we are quite as comfortable here as we shall be at Seltso on the other bank. I believe the reason of the relief is that the Regiment is going to do a raid on the Bolo's front line next week. Two companies are going to operate on this bank and one on the other. We don't expect many casualties, but we do expect many prisoners and with luck hope to pinch or spike the guns, especially the new 6-in. howitzer and 4.2 guns which have been brought up. Most of the Bolo guns are British, those that we sent out to the Imperial Army.

General Ironside wants us to send home photographs to the papers in order to popularise this campaign. I shall send one of the officers of "A" Company outside the famous Grafton Gallery, our shack here in Canadian Village, Don't you think it is a good name for it? The Colonel would not let us stay in Chateau Rickety because it was such an excellent registration mark for the Bolo gunners.

The mosquitoes create the greatest problem of life in these parts. They seem to invade even the sanctity of a mosquito net. The best plan is to take it in turns to beat them off while crawling underneath the net. And then, woe betide you if you fail to tuck the net under your flea-bag, or sleep with any part of your anatomy touching the meshes of the net. I suppose they are long sick of Russian fare for they never seem to worry the Russian gunners, whereas we are fresh and succulent and a change of diet to the little brutes. There is also another and venomous pest in a giant type of horse fly which has just been



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hatched out. It is somewhat like a hornet, but has brown instead of yellow stripes on its body; its head consists of great big iridescent green eyes. This brute can and does bite through practically anything.

The climate is ideal for shorts and shirt sleeves, but my knees are so bitten and sunburnt that I have been compelled to wear breeches. The rainstorms are short and very heavy, and it is possible to get soaked to the skin and yet dry oneself in the sun in 10 minutes.

The wild flowers are heavenly. There are marsh plants that I have never seen before, and wild roses abound. The banks are a mass of purple pansies, violets and a very bright blue flower.

I am afraid this is very dull, but there is nothing to write about. It seems like ten years since we left England. However, all is well at this end. The time will go quicker now, and I hope we will spend the winter in England, though I think it is hardly likely. I should not mind a winter out here just for the experience, but for no other reason. I've never heard of a campaign yet, when the Staff did not say it would be over in six months.

*June 19th,* 1919. *Seltso*

Philip and I crossed over here with our platoons to-day. It is rather a jolly little village, providing billets for all the men and a good mess and sleeping quarters for us.

*M.K.N.*

*June 24th,* 1919. *Seltso.*

The second mail came up yesterday, and I was sorry to hear that you had not yet heard from me. By now you must have had plenty of news from me. The parcel which arrived also was simply wonderful. I beamed and smiled at it's contents, and everyone in the mess smiled, and beamed and the world seemed rosy.

This village is quite close to the river. In the early morning we don Burberrys and plunge into the tepid waters and come back for breakfast. The day from 11 a.m. onwards is too hot for work, so we loll in the mess, bathe again before tea and after dinner go out shooting in gum boots across the swamps. The other day we got a brace of oyster catchers, which provided the first fresh meat since we disembarked at Archangel. We shoot anything we see, because bully and maconochie become so monotonous after a bit that any change is a delicacy. That is the order of the day here, and I can tell you that we are thoroughly enjoying ourselves.



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Never have I known such warm bathing, such hot sun, such horse flies in the daytime and such mosquitoes at night! The flies take over from the gnats about 2 a.m., and the mosquitoes take over from the flies about 10 p.m.. So we have an omnipresent pest in our 24 hours! But still our rest is a good rest, and the greatest fun.

*B.H.A.N.*

*June 25th,* 1919 *Seltso.*

To-morrow we are making a raid on the Bolos, "A" and "C" Companies on the left bank and "B" on the right. It is going to be a pretty big affair. The first position is going to be assaulted by Nos. 1 and 2 Platoons, ably led by "yours truly" and Toby. On capturing the line we disarm prisoners and demolish everything. Meanwhile Nos. 3 and 4 Platoons pass through us and demonstrate in front of Ignatovskaya. "C" Company in turn passes through them and captures the village.

We are due to assault at 11.15 p.m., and the whole force withdraws at 3.30 a.m. We hope to have no casualties, and, as we are going to attack the Bolo in flank, it ought to be a howling success.

The guns are going to fire rapid, machine guns are to traverse along his front line and trench mortars are going to keep his right flank busy from the other bank. Toby and I rush in from the right and take him on his left flank. This is the scheme. It's going to be damned good fun, I think. Anyway, I'll let you know in 48 hours' time what happened.

*June 27th,* 1919. *Seltso.*

Well, the show is now over, and was not the success that was expected. I am feeling very depressed; the same old story, late on the forming up point and shelled by our own guns. Our casualties were: "A" Company, Killed: 1 serjeant 1 private. Wounded: 2 officers; 14 privates. "C" Company, Killed: 1 officer and eight other ranks. Wounded: 2 officers and 10 other ranks.

I do not know what casualties "B" Company sustained.

*R.J.N.N.*

*June 27th,* 1919. *Seltso.*

Last night we made a raid on the Bolo and I think you might like to hear something about it.

The barrage table was as follows:—Two .18-pounders, two 4.5 howitzers, one 60-pounder on the left bank, and two 3.7 howitzers on the right bank, were to put down a barrage



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on the Bolo front position from 23 hours to 23.05 hours, and again from 23.10 to 23.15 hours, at which time Nos. 1 and 2 Platoons were to assault. Therefore, we wanted to be formed up in the forest at 23 hours and to crawl forward during the bombardment as near as possible to the Bolo front line.

We started off at 22.15 hours, and entered the forest opposite the Pimple post in Mala Beresnik. We formed up just on the edge ready to advance at 22.30 hours. I realised at that moment that we should be late on our jumping-off point! My theoretical position was 600 yards on Toby's right, and he had to advance 1,500 yards before he reached his position. To my dismay, I realised that I had to lead my command over a mile through thick forest taking necessary precautions in advancing; that I had to reconnoitre my jumping-off point, and that to do this I had only half an hour.

Taking the bull by the horns, we floundered through the forest, chancing the presence of any Bolos lying in ambush, and managed to get within 200 yards of the Bolo position at 23 hours, from which point I was to advance still further to the right, and get well on the enemy's left flank. But before I could get my bearings the bombardment started.

The noise was simply terrific when the guns and machine guns got going. The echo and reverberations of bursting shells and flying bullets were deafening, and though there were only nine guns firing it seemed as if there might be nine hundred, as the noise of each shot resounded from tree to tree.

The first things I realised were three deafening crashes behind me, betokening that our guns were firing short. I quickened my pace and reached the clearing in front of the Bolo line and turned slightly right. Then it was that I found that there were only six men behind me. I shouted to them to lie down, and went back to try and collect the rest of my platoon. I found Toby with both legs shattered, but no sign of Naylor who was commanding the right half company. I collected a few men and advanced, after sending back my servant to warn "Bingo" of the shemozzle.

I found my six men of the Lewis gun team, just as the bombardment stopped at 23.05 hours, and we all lay down at the edge of the forest facing the front of the Bolo line. As soon as the guns stopped, the Bolos let fly into the forest with two machine guns. Bullets were cutting young fir trees in half and cracking and crashing through the forest like a tornado. At 23.10 hours our guns started again and my party crawled forward again to the high fence in front of the Bolo line. At the very second that it was time to assault Naylor suddenly appeared from behind leading the men who had scattered at the beginning of the bombardment, and we all attacked. But



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once over the seven foot fence we found the front line deserted, except for 17 very frightened individuals and two machine guns.

As you can imagine, I was very thankful to see Naylor as I had visions of assaulting with nine men and a Lewis gun!

The majority of the men had never been in action before. I escaped being killed by a stroke of luck, for as I was scaling the fence I saw a man behind me letting off his rifle from sheer excitement, and regardless of who was in front of him. I am sorry to think that the noise drowned the curses that I hurled at him! However, there was an excuse, because the men are mostly boys of 18 who have had very little training and less experience.

We found the 17 Bolos cringing in funk holes. While mopping up, one young soldier came rushing up to me with fire flashing in his eyes and lusting for blood. "I've found a Bolo, Sir. May I kill him? Do let me, Sir." I had some difficulty in preventing him, but was pleased to see that he had a good spirit.

Then we re-organised, mustered the prisoners to fill in the trenches and make a road for the rest of the troops, evacuated the wounded, destroyed equipment and dug-outs, and sent back the machine guns.

As soon as the protective barrage lifted, Nos. 3 and 4 Platoons went forward as advance guard, followed by "C" Company, Regimental Headquarters, transport horses, gun teams to take away captured guns, and lastly my platoon as rearguard. No. 2 Platoon was left behind to carry on the systematic destruction of the Bolo front line.

I did not see much more of the fight from my position as reserve. Contact with the enemy at Ignatovskaya was indicated by wild and indiscriminate firing, the bullets presumably aimed at the advance guard kicking up the dust in the road where I was, 300 to 400 yards behind our front line troops!

We had to wait for two hours for the barrage on the village, because the signal arrangements had broken down with the first shell that was fired, the shell so frightening the pony of the signal cart that he turned and bolted, to be no more seen. And for two hours the Bolos kept up a terrific fusillade with machine guns and rifles. As reserve platoon I was called up to within view of the Bolo position in case I was wanted.

Meanwhile, Nos. 3 and 4 Platoons had worked forward by rushes to the enemy's wire, only to be withdrawn a little later to allow the barrage to be put down. The latter was weak and so ineffective that when "C" Company and our



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platoons went forward they were still held up by machine guns, and strong wire. Early on in this fight " Bingo " B was wounded in the groin. I saw him while he was being dressed, and I'm afraid he suffered a lot though the Doctor said it was not serious or dangerous.

At 3.30 the Regiment retired according to plan, and I found the rearguard with my platoon. The retirement was quite uneventful, and we reached Canadian Village at 5.30 a.m. where we found the wounded lying on stretchers. " Bingo " was in frightful pain, because his wound was swelling and he could hardly bear the sway of the stretcher. Yet never did a word of complaint pass his lips. He bore it very bravely. He was wounded right up in front while explaining the situation to Northcote of " C " Company. He set a wonderful example to us all in calmness under fire and patience in extreme pain. Try and imagine a journey of five miles over a rough road in an old drosky cart!

Our casualties were :—one officer and eight other ranks killed, three officers and 26 other ranks wounded.

The Colonel was splendid, very cool and calm. It was not his fault that the show was not a howling success.

The Bolos fought much better than we have been led to expect ; we suspected that the machine gun teams were manned by Boches.

The prisoners were a miserable looking lot. They seemed to be younger than our boys. Their uniform was anything but uni-form. They were in fact indistinguishable from such of the civilian population as I have seen. A few had our pattern of box respirators, which they had captured from the Americans at Shenkursk. Their greatcoats were of varying colours, grey, drab, lavender, etc., and their rations simply awful, consisting of a lump of black bread, that's all.

I expect that those that we did capture had every intention of being taken prisoner, while the others did a bunk after the first bombardment.

The enemy had had every indication of an attack. Our aeroplanes were flying over their lines all day yesterday, dropping bombs and spotting guns, and in the evening, just before we attacked they went over again and dropped eighteen 112 lb. bombs on their forward position and gun emplacements. Such unusual activity on our part must have told them as much as a written message from the Staff telling them that we were going to attack.

The raid failed because it developed into an attack. We were never close enough on the enemy's heels and felt the want of cavalry. One troop could have had a marvellous time as soon as we had captured the front position.



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Doubtless we could have captured Ignatovskaya if we had had more men, or if we had surprised the enemy or prevented the front line troops rejoining the main line of defence. But all hope of surprise disappeared with our heavy preparatory bombardments.

We suffered a good bit, too, from the inexperience of the men and especially section leaders. I found that I was always doing their job as well as my own, and that they had no idea of leadership through lack of training.

I think also that if the two leading platoons, Nos. 1 and 2, had had time to form up and attack according to the plan, we would have taken many more prisoners. The Bolo put down a pretty heavy barrage on Nos. 3 and 4 advancing behind us, but luckily only one man was hit slightly.

Anyway it was quite a pretty little battle and gave us some experience in forest fighting from which I hope we shall be able to profit.

Again, had we had an 18-pounder and a trench mortar we should have fared better, but no one was to know that before starting; the whole point of the show was dash and quickness, and not to sit down and fire. I don't think you could call it a failure, and yet it was not a success.

The deciding point is to know whether the Bolo's morale is increased or not. I don't think our captures justified the casualties, and the toll in officers was heavy.

The mess seems very empty without "Bingo" B and Toby. It seems as if the family has been broken up. The remainder of us are well, and have slept long and heavily.

There are rumours of our moving over to the Dvina front for an offensive there, but these have not been confirmed yet. Another rumour states that, in a month's time, 17,000 Siberians of Koltchak's Army are going to join up with us on this front, and so unite the two armies. How they will get here, Gawd alone knows. The only available route is by the Kara Sea; by land it seems impossible. The more work the Russians do, the better. After all, it is their civil war, not ours. Perhaps I am feeling a bit depressed and that is why I write like this.

The weather remains as beautiful as ever, the sun hotter if anything, and the river water warmer. The latter is falling rapidly. It is almost possible to wade across it and new spits of sand seem to appear every day.

In a week's time I shall be 22. How old I am getting! I hope that you have received some of my many screeds which I am afraid you will find very dull reading.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*July 2nd,* 1919. *Seltso.*

A spurious kind of mail came up last night bringing me a letter from you dated June 5th. This morning I read the debate in the Commons on adjournment in which Churchill answered some pertinent questions concerning this force. He announced that we were policemen! which is not true, but impertinent! If we are so negligible how is it that we raid the Bolo twice in one week?

To-night No. 1, led by me, and No. 2 Platoon, commanded by Sawyer, since Toby was wounded, are going to raid the same position as before. But this time we are going for them without a barrage. I hope to God it will be a success and that we shall not have as many casualties as last time. I have a horror of being badly hit and left to the mercies of the Bolos. Nothing could be worse than to be taken prisoner by these devils.

I'll finish this when I get back, if I do!!

July 4th.

Well, you see, I did come back quite safely, but with a wound in my left arm this time. Anyway, I can't get hit in another arm! It is nothing serious; a bullet tore a furrow in the muscle of my upper arm. It will be healed in a week, and I shall be back at duty. So don't get the wind up if you see my name in the casualty list, if there is one in these days.

Perhaps you would like to hear how the accident happened. I consider myself damned lucky to be able to write at all. I ought to be pushing weeds at this moment in the forest!

Serjeant Swift and his satellites rowed us across the river in semi-waterlogged boats, and we started marching up to Mala Beresnik about 8.30 p.m., through the Russian Gunner Lines to Canadian Village. We arrived at about 9.30 and then fell out. As we were not going to leave our perimeter till 12.30 there were three hours to wait. Of all the damnable things on earth, waiting to attack is the most damnable. You know the sensation of suppressed excitement, when your imagination runs riot and you can see yourself a mangled corpse or wounded, or a prisoner obnoxious to frightful atrocities, and a hundred and one other empty visions. A chap without an imagination is the man I envy.

As the time passes the needle in the pit of the stomach pricks more poignantly, until you pray for action, movement, anything in fact rather than this infernal waiting.



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During the wait the plan of action is discussed again with the officer of "D" Company, and the scheme, it's object and objective are minutely explained for the latter's benefit.

My platoon, No. 1, is to form up on the enemy's extreme left flank and is to give the signal for attack by moving forward in enfilade on the Bolo's trench. Sawyer's platoon, No. 2, is to carry on the advance as soon as I am in motion, sweep across the front of the section of trench that I am attacking, and take the enemy's right section of trench in enfilade from the left. No. 15 Platoon is to pass through and mop up the enemy's trench overlooking the river bank.

We are having no barrage, therefore silence in the forest is essential, and quickness in mopping up very important. The line captured, we are to re-organise and reconnoitre the new line under construction, burn the dug-outs, and return via the river bank.

That was the plan, and providing that we could establish ourselves on the enemy's flank without being seen, the prospect of success seemed favourable. Everything therefore, depended on our negotiation of the forest between the lines.

There is something uncanny about the great silent forest. The slightest noise starts your heart thumping; and it is easy to approach within a few yards of a Bolo without seeing him, even with your eyes skinned, as the Americans say.

We started from Canadian Village at midnight and wound our weary way up the trench to the Pimple. From here we crossed the rye field by sections and entered the forest. Having formed up in platoons, we advanced in file, No. 1 on the left, followed by the Sapper demolition party, No. 2 on the right, followed by No. 15 Platoon. When within 200 yards of the clearing immediately in front of his road position, five shots rang out indicating the presence of an enemy patrol. This was awkward, because it was important that the Bolo should know nothing of our numbers or intentions. As my platoon had furthest to go, Naylor ordered me to strike off to the right and try to reconnoitre my position. There was no landmark to march on, so out came my compass and I checked the direction after every 100 yards to make certain that we were moving S.S.E. We toiled on very slowly and cautiously, keeping to the ravines in the forest, and relying on the flankers on the left to report the presence of any enemy.

Suddenly the flankers reported seeing a Bolo about 50 yards ahead. I halted the column and went forward and scanned the forest through my glasses. Not a sign of a soul!

After this scare we pushed on very slowly, and yet our rate of progress seemed to make no difference to the amount



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of noise from the troops behind me. I could not imagine how it was that we were not heard in Archangel; the troops sounded to me like a herd of elephants crashing through the forest. The nearer we got to the Bolo position, the more the point and flankers saw 'men like trees walking.' At each alarm of "Hist, Bolo," I went forward. Each reconnaissance of mine produced the same sight, trees, trees, everlasting trees, and not one being on two legs. Naylor behind me waxed a trifle impatient: "Can't you move a bit quicker? Are you sure you are going in the right direction? On the latter point I was not at all sure, and it shook my confidence to have my direction called in question.

I don't think I have ever enjoyed a job less than that compass march through the forest. Tracks and paths were always being encountered to distract me from my bearing. They afforded easy and silent going, but I eschewed them as 'a snare and delusion.' Shorn of all steel trappings, I stood with my eyes glued to the prism of my compass, while the gnats swarmed over my face. I knew that there must be Bolos prowling about and the possibility of an ambush was very apparent. I was responsible, practically speaking, for the safety of the troops behind me, and I had to turn a deaf ear to the entreaties from behind to "get a move on, for the love of Mike."

At about 2 a.m. Naylor came up and asked me if I thought I was well behind the Bolo position. I had not the foggiest idea really, but it seemed probable. I suggested that we should go a bit further and make certain of being well in the enemy's rear. Naylor overruled this in consideration of the time we had taken; it was then 2 a.m. I was not sorry, for I was very bored with the pace of progress, and the incessant alarms of "Hist, Bolo." In fact my temper had risen and I felt like braining any soldier who said these words.

So, I turned left handed, intending to try and find the edge of the forest, and get my bearings. Gradually the forest got thinner, until at last I saw daylight between the trees and I knew that the clearing wherein was the enemy's position, must be quite close.

I halted the platoon, and took my Platoon Serjeant, servant, and two scouts forward with me. We came to a thinning in the forest across which was a path leading to the Bolo position. "This," thought I, "may be their advanced gun position." I assumed that we were well in the rear of their trench position and that my chief care must be a reconnaissance with my right shoulder forward. Very cautiously I led the patrol forward. But when I was plumb in the middle of this thinning, I realised instinctively that my men



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were not following. I had a cold and lonely feeling. I looked round to see them all lying down on their bellies. "What the bloody hell is the matter with you all?" I asked in a stage whisper.

"Bolos," whispered Serjeant Botley, pointing to my right rear.

"You've seen nothing but Bolos the whole blinking night," I replied. "Come on, for God's sake."

I had hardly uttered these words when there was a cracking of whiplashes all round me. I was facing the men when the machine gun opened fire. One of the first shots hit me in the arm, but the rest of the belt went wide.

We made for cover pretty quickly, and I reported to Naylor. By this time blood was trickling down my arm and my breeches felt extremely wet! I wasn't certain whether I had been hit in the bottom as well or been childish from fright! But when my servant took off my equipment he showed me my water-bottle minus a cork, but plus its retaining chain. A bullet had therefore removed the cork! That was a near one for my kidneys, because we wear our waterbottles on our left hips on the belt.

I might easily have walked straight into the Bolos and not seen them, and even when they opened fire I had not the faintest idea where they were firing from. How they missed me at less than fifty yards range is a mystery to me. A donkey with his eyes shut could have laid me out for keeps.

While I was being dressed, a terrific fusillade broke out on both sides, during which Naylor somehow managed to deploy the three platoons. Then they advanced in line, scaled the seven foot fence, while L/Cpl. Martin swept the Bolo trenches with his Lewis gun. The results of the raid were eight Bolos killed, and one machine gun captured, while our casualties were two men slightly wounded.

It transpired that we were in front of the Bolo position, so that all my care was wasted. Perhaps if we had taken more risks and moved faster, we should have attacked it in the rear. This mistake only goes to prove how deceptive distances are in this infernal forest, and how difficult it is to gauge ground covered.

I went down to the hospital and had my arm dressed; it is pretty comfortable, except at night.

The whole accident was very similar to last summer's; it is also curious that I should have been hit again at such close range, while performing the same kind of work. I know that a Boche would have killed me at that range.

There is nothing to worry about. I shall be down here until the wound has healed a bit. "A" Company is taking



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over the right bank defences at Nijni Kitsa to-day. I have taken over Headquarter Company from Hamilton, who is going to command No. 1 Platoon in my absence.

To-morrow I am 22. I hope you will drink to the health of the 43rd and the success of the new North Russian Force of Constabulary! You might ask the Government to send us out some truncheons with which to deal more effectively with these turbulent Bolos. We don't want whistles!

*R.J.N.N.*

*Sunday, July 6th,* 1919. *Seltso.*

Since I wrote last, I have received three letters from you and a parcel of cakes, chutney, sweets, etc., for which I thank you most heartily. You are all very clever at realising what we want out here. I've never had a dud mail yet, unlike some less fortunate brother officers. Sawyer has had one bill only since we arrived. The arm is getting on very well. In a week from now it ought to be quite healed, and then I shall be able to resume duty. I suffered more from shock than anything, and my nerves were a bit unstrung at first, but that soon passed off. I certainly had the shock of my life when that damned machine gun opened fire!

I visited "A" Company yesterday, armed with your cake, and stopped to tea and dinner. Nijni Kitsa has the best defences of all the villages on this column. It is practically impregnable and has good shacks for billets.

Carter came up from Beresnik with good news of "Bingo" B and Toby. They are both much better than we expected. "Bingo" had a very lucky escape, the bullet just missing the femoral artery and his bladder.

*B.H.A.N.*

*July 8th,* 1919. *Seltso.*

A heavy storm has broken. The opposite bank of the river is blotted out. This is the first rain for over a month; it is coming down now like a tropical deluge.

Did you see that "Shiny" Horley had got a M.C. in the Birthday Honours? I am sorry and angry to see that Crosse got nothing. He ought to have got a C.M.G. like our present Colonel.

The latter is very keen on fishing, and if anyone starts talking about it, he always joins in and talks to us as if we were all as good at it as himself. He, Dick Warren, and I flog the river every evening, and he catches half-pounders to my tiddlers! He is very encouraging, and never tires of talk-



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ing about fishing. I am very fond of him, indeed. He has a very merry twinkle in his eye. To him I am nothing more than a boy!

We have just received the papers telling of the signing of Peace, and the accompanying jubilations. It is rather curious to note that on that day we raided the Bolos and had 30 casualties. And the Bolos aren't worth a kopeck, and we haven't even declared war on them. This is not a grouse; it's a coincidence; when these clouds have rolled away and the rain has ceased to drip down the back of my neck, I shall feel better.

The sprig of verbena arrived, plus smell. My mind flew back to that well-worn path: out of the east door: round by the billiard room: straight for the kitchen garden gate, slamming it as I go on towards that corner where the verbena and fuchsias grow: dart round the greenhouse, turn the handle, and squeeze the ripest nectarine. Then, revelling in its juice, out into the sun to the musical hum and buzz of flies and bees. I can see that corner where the peaches grow, and I can feel the heat radiating off the greenhouse wall. The beech tree and the cool lawn, all and every inch of the garden I can see in my mind's eye. But it is not a good thing to ponder too much on such a prospect until these alarums and excursions become "noises off" in actual fact.

*July* 14*th*. *Seltso*.

A ration of fresh meat came up yesterday, which the Quartermaster buried as soon as volunteers had carried it ashore!

The gilded ones evidently fear an outbreak of scurvy or something of the sort, because a wonderful order has been circulated to Companies, showing exactly how to germinate tinned peas! It is called, "Organised Germination," and has to be carried out under the supervision of Captains of Companies, who are to obey the instructions to the letter.

Mason, the Quartermaster, gave a demonstration to the assembled captains, reading from the book of words. He read out:—

"(1). A blanket is to be saturated thoroughly in the river."

Voice from John Carr, 49th Regiment, "Whose?"

"The instructions do not state," replied Mason.

"It's easy for you, old chap," Carr persisted, "but we can't win blankets!"

Quite unperturbed, Mason read on:—

"(2) Lay the blanket out in the sun." Private Sadler, alias "Brassy," the Quartermaster's inimitable henchman and



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storeman, came forward with a saturated blanket on the origin of which, we noticed, Mason failed to remark!

"(3) The peas are now emptied out on to half the blanket."

A rattle of shrapnel and the anaemic bisillae scattered in all directions.

"(4) The peas are to be placed in fours on half the blanket as in column of route." At that Private Sadler, on his hands and knees, placed each pea in its proper position in the column.

"Won't the peas germinate unless they are in fours?" Peck asked, in a plaintive voice, "I should have thought they would have felt more "matey" and natural in pairs, but doubtless, the Army knows best."

Unheeding the interruption, the Quartermaster carried on manfully.

"(5) The unused half of the blanket is now folded over the peas and left for at least 24 hours. Only germinated peas are to be used for subsequent cooking."

We have tried to entice life out of their stubborn anatomies, but so obdurate are the peas that their hearts have never once so much as fluttered!

Mason has also been deputed to bake bread without yeast. The result is only fit to be fired out of a gun and then it would spoil the rifling!

Thank God! we've got a Staff! What the devil should we do without one, I wonder!

*B.H.A.N.*

*July 16th.* *Seltso.*

You must be having a marvellous summer at home. The river here is tepid, but I can't bathe because of getting my dressing wet.

The wound is getting on splendidly, but still resembles a piece of half cooked bacon. I am awfully glad I did not have to go to the C.C.S. at Beresnik. It would have been far duller there than here. Rumours are prevalent of an early return of the British element in these parts, either in August or September. Personally, I don't think we shall leave till the river is frozen over or just about to freeze in October.

Perhaps you remember my description of the presentation of colours to the 1st Battalion Slavo-British Legion. That battalion mutinied the other day on the Dvina and murdered four British officers. The murders were perpetrated by some N.C.O.'s who persuaded about 100 men to desert to the Bolos after the deeds were done. I believe that about 48 of them have



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been caught and are now being guarded by Sadleir-Jackson's Brigade. Not content with murder, they mutilated these officers. These Russians, our so-called allies, are not worth their fodder. They are savages and would be cannibals, only they haven't got the brains to think of it! The Bolos certainly ought to be annihilated.

Ironside imagined that he would be able to make his offensive with Russian troops, supported by British. Now the case is reversed. We shall have to attack with the possibility of Russians firing at us from behind.

Thank heaven, we have only got Russian gunners on our front who have proved themselves to be stout fellows.

The other day something occurred which gave us a topic of conversation at least. A corporal of the Royal Scots, attached to "C" Company for the purposes of this war, who had been taken prisoner by the Bolos in our raid on Ignatovskaya, suddenly turned up at Mala Beresnik. He was questioned by Tamplin, the Intelligence Officer, and said that after capture he was taken to Kitsa on the right bank, and thence to Bolo Brigade Headquarters at Shegovari. There he was put on a job. The remaining four prisoners had been left at Kitsa. There were two officers with him (one was the officer commanding the aerodrome, a sinecure because the Bolos have no aeroplanes) who disappeared into a shack while he was working. During their absence he had slipped away and walked 30 versts along the river bank to Mala Beresnik. He produced photographs of himself sitting at a table spread with bogus food and drinks, and another of himself arm-in-arm with two officers. In answer to Tamplin's questions, he admitted that he had really only had a small piece of bread and a little soup once a day, since his capture. He was then asked what villages he had passed through on his way back to our lines, and he said "None." Tamplin, who knows every inch of the ground between Shegovari and Mala Beresnik, knew that it was impossible to cover that distance without encountering a village. He, therefore, reported to the Colonel that the corporal was lying. The latter was brought before the Colonel, who said to him, "Now tell me what really happened, because I don't believe one word of your story." Thereupon the corporal admitted that he had been offered his freedom by the Bolsheviks on the condition that he would spread propaganda among the troops. He had been instructed to tell the troops that all that they had been told about the Bolsheviks and their methods, was entirely untrue; that the campaign was being carried on by the officers and senior non-commissioned officers, who alone wanted to fight; that he was to urge the troops to hold soviets and proclaim their own



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orders, and do what they liked; and that in order to do this, they should deal with their officers just as the Slavo-British Legion had dealt with theirs, by murder!

He admitted that the story of his escape was a tissue of lies; in actual fact he had been taken up to the front line where the Bolos had introduced their bootmakers to his tailor, and he had walked across No Man's Land. Through this corporal we heard news of the other four prisoners who are being starved in their prison camp, just as he had been starved.

The Colonel has sent him down to the Base, the best place for him.

*M.K.N.*

*July 16th.* *Seltso.*

I am going to try and answer your letter amidst the flies, sweat and stuffiness of this, my billet.

I have been here for about a month. Every day is exactly like the last, and merely the discovery of a new pest gives us something to talk about.

However, two Bolos deserted yesterday, and gave us some good information. One of them had been in command of a platoon on the Dvina. The Bolos do not approve of officers, of course; but they put someone in charge, in order to have someone to punish. They had to give up the idea of putting a whole platoon in cells, so instituted officers under the supervision of commissars. This man was an ardent supporter of Bolshevism until he was court-martialed for allowing his platoon to run away when we attacked on the Dvina. He was sentenced to 15 years hard labour. So long as they are serving actively, the families of soldiers are fed by the Government; but if they are convicted of an 'uncommunistic' crime, their families are struck off rations. So this chap deserted, knowing full well that his family would be left to starve in any case.

He gave us some excellent information on the results of our two raids. On the 26th/27th they sustained the following losses: 11 killed, 50 wounded, and 17 prisoners. Among the killed was a Bolo regimental commander, a big bug. He and his horse and a shell arrived at the same spot simultaneously; and he and the horse came off second best.

In the second raid of July 2nd, we killed two of the chief Bolos of the 156th Regiment. One of them was president of the regimental soviet. So, though we did not kill quantity, we put quality out of mess. All of which is good news.

The Bolo has left his forward position, because he is sick of being raided, and has retired to a new one.

It is far too sweaty to write any more now.



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*July 17th.*

Last night a very amusing thing happened on the left bank in front of Mala Beresnik. Having received information from the deserters that the 6th Soviet Regiment was going to relieve the 156th, a strong patrol was sent out to lie in wait for the relief troops, between their front line and Ignatovskaya.

From 11.30 to 2 a.m. we heard a heavy fire of rifles and machine guns waxing from desultory into intense fire at times. Here in Seltso we had wind up that our patrol must be having a very hot time. Yet, when the report came in, the officer stated that he had reconnoitred the Bolo front line, and found it unoccupied. At 11.30 p.m. he had withdrawn, after firing a few shots into the blue for luck. Thereafter ensued a battle royal.

The assumption is this: our guns had shelled their line during the day and, probably the front line troops, thinking we were going to raid again, left the line without handing over. Our parthian shots may have landed somewhere near them or the relief troops coming up the road from Ignatovskaya towards the front line. Then, we think, they must have let fly at each other. The battle behind the Bolo lines did not start until our patrol opened fire, and the latter heard it start when they were well on their way home. I can so well imagine the Bolos fighting each other. They are quite capable of it. On the other hand, it may have been a mutiny which is a common occurrence in their forces.

The mosquitoes have given place to myriads of sand flies, which are small enough to negotiate the meshes of a net.

*July 18th.*

I'm glad that you seem to like my efforts at description of this country. As in France, so here, the romance wears off as soon as you leave the civilian population and settle down to life in the prohibited areas. I never seem to tire of the country. Though I loathe the relentlessness of the forest from experience, I love the broad shimmering river, cloudless sky, and burning sun. The forest spreading mile after mile, clothed in a blue haze of summer heat, looks soft and downy, as if you could stroke it. But when you enter it, and see and feel the insect life seething, buzzing and humming amidst the soggy putrefaction of decaying vegetation, then it is that you quickly lose the illusion of its velvet sleekness. The mail has raised my morale and I can look on the dusty road, the sun-dried weed-ridden fields, and the glorious spit of golden sand that lies in the middle of the river, almost with affection.



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*B.H.A.N.*

*July 20th.* *Seltso.*

A deserter has given us details of the battle behind the Bolo lines on the night of the 17th. There was to have been a relief that night, and the Bolos took the shells to be the precursors of another raid, as on the 26th. The front line troops immediately scuttled towards Ignatovskaya, their second position, in front of which they were met by the fire of the garrison, who mistook these renegades for British troops attacking!

There was a terrific battle in which 16 Bolos were killed. Their Staff has been trying to explain away this catastrophe by spreading the rumour that we attacked Ignatovskaya, and were driven off, with the loss of 16 killed.

As it happens, this is the presumption that was put forward at the time, and it has turned out to be perfectly correct.

What a glorious shemozzle there would have been if we had really been attacking!

*R.J.N.N.*

*July 21st.* *Seltso.*

To-day we had a mail which brought me your parcel of food. I had another from Angela, so that I am very well stocked now. I am waiting to be returned to duty before I embark on most of the contents. I can't express in words my gratitude to you for sending me all these things, which just make the difference between monotony and luxury.

There is no danger attached to fishing within view of Bololand. I am an old enough soldier to know what is safe and vice versa. I never tempt Providence; she is too fickle.

I read the report in *The Times* of the Southport Conference. These bloody men are at it again; the same unmentionables as were pacifists in the last war. After all, what the hell does it matter to them what happens in this wretched country. It is always the same: the men who do least, talk most. Moreover, the talkers have done nothing to help their country. Anyone with the brain or conception of a louse could see that our intervention in this country was essential. The Bolsheviks, not the Russians, let us down in the war; so why should we betray our allies to this scourge of Bolshevism. Why can't these hell-hounds be patient? The time is approaching when we shall be able to evacuate with dignity and leave the loyal Russians to carry on, and administer the doses periodically. Bolshevism is like rabies, and if the suspects are muzzled, it will die out automatically. Can anyone



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suppose that nationalisation of women can last? Again, if they try to eradicate religion, something worse will only spring up to take its place.

To-day's communiqué states that in a town in South Russia, the local soviet has put up a statue to Judas Iscariot, to show that it is unprejudiced! The Bolos haven't got a sense of humour, poor fish.

I wish you would write a letter to *The Times*. Socialist gup is bad for the morale of the troops. They will begin to think that they ought to be at home.

*July 22nd.*

I am engrossed in reading the papers of June 28th, and the signing of Peace. Rather wonderful to get a letter from you written as the guns were firing the salute.

The latest rumour is that 5,000 Bolos are marching on Beresnik to cut our communications!! Hot air, I think.

I also hear that the dockers in England are refusing to load goods for us here. The canteen at Archangel has been forced to close down, because they declined to load the stuff as soon as they knew it was bound for Archangel. Pretty!! Query. Why tell the swabs?

*R.J.N.N.*

*July 29th,* *Nijni Kitsa.*

You must have known very early that I had been wounded. The other day, the Colonel handed me a long correspondence which was the result of your cable to Ironside. (But why Ironside? However, no matter). Your cable was dated the 11th, and from that date till the 25th, the Staff tried to find me. There were copies of telegrams to the Base; not known. Others to the Dvina Force, hospitals, and barges; not known. Then someone with a spark more of intelligence than the rest, wrote, "Try Regiment." Sure enough they found me in the end, after drawing the obvious covert last. It gave me a good insight into the workings of their brazen brains. I expect the chap who got the brain-wave will get an Order of St. Anne for it. They thought, apparently, that I could reach the Base without passing through the C.C.S. at Beresnik, but what the devil was the good of wiring to the Base if there was no record of my passing through.

Anyway, by the time the correspondence reached me it was useless to cable to you, because you must have received a letter by now.

I have been returned to duty, thank God. The wound is still open and septic. As my right arm is gammy I have to



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use the wounded one. I can't afford to rest it or I should be completely useless.

This village is in a wonderful position on high ground, commanding all lines of approach. Wind, however, is almost vertical. G.H.Q. has left Beresnik and retired to Archangel. This column has only three companies since "D" was sent back for some unknown reason. They may have gone to act as G.H.Q. troops or to act as a reserve on the Railway or Onega front. In place of them, we have been given a battalion of Russians which is eventually to take over this front. Two officers and 40 men are coming to us to-night for us to break in. I should feel much happier if they had no arms!

"Tiger" Wyld came over from Troitsa on the Dvina to see us the other day. This column is now attached to his Brigade. He told us some gruesome details of the mutiny of the Slavo-British Legion. The atrocities perpetrated on the body of the Russian regimental serjeant-major are indescribable. One officer escaped, although wounded, by swimming to a monitor lying in the river. Our gallant little Brigadier saved the situation by rushing out in his pyjamas and firing a 4.5 howitzer at point blank range into a soviet of mutineers.

"Tiger" had a long journey to make to reach us. Though we are only 40 vests from Troitsa as crow flies, he had to take a C.M.B. to Kurgomin, whence an aeroplane to Beresnik and a pony via Ust Vaga to Seltso.

Our Brigade is completely disintegrated. General Grogan is on the Pinega front with two companies of the 67th, while the other two companies have gone to different fronts altogether.

I have heard from Toby. "Bingo" B is in a dangerous condition.

*B.H.A.N.*

*July 31st.* *Nijni Kitsa.*

I was returned to duty on the 27th, at my own request. The wound does not seem to be making much progress. It has been like this for the last fortnight. The hole has closed up, but the skin has not formed owing to sepsis which means a return to hot fomentations. It is a far longer job than I expected. I have been a month with this one open, but my last wound healed in a week.

A deserter came in the other day, and gave some vague information that the Bolo is going to attack this place to-night. This village stands very high and commands the country southwards like a castle, and I think the enemy will catch a cold if he tries to bump us here.



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The morale of the troops is not very high. They are bored with the inactivity; also diarrhoea and boils are breaking out amongst them. Considering that we have had no fresh food or vegetables for two months, it is hardly surprising.

There are wild rumours floating round of a withdrawal of British troops, over which a good many chaps are going to lose money! If we do move from here, we shall probably only go to another front. This one is quite comfortable and quiet, and it would be a pity to exchange it for a worse one.

The nights are beginning to draw in now. We dine at 10 p.m., and then stroll round the defences in bunches, or sit about in greatcoats fighting our battles over again. At 1 a.m. we make our way towards the Grafton Gallery, where "cafyoolie"—i.e. café-au-lait—awaits us, hot and steaming. To bed, just as it is getting light between 2 and 2.30 a.m., and up to breakfast at 11.30 a.m.

That is our daily programme, and very seldom does anything intervene to disturb it.

There is, however, shooting in a little stream which surrounds the village, fishing in the river, and an excellent pitch for stump cricket. Not long ago we exploded a 10 lb. mortar bomb in the river. The result was a 20 lb. pike, besides many other smaller fry. My Gawd, that pike was a brute! It took us three-quarters of an hour to get him into the boat, which was rapidly filling with water owing to our great activities, and the shouts of laughter from the four of us. Every time we touched him he gaped at us, flicked his tail and disappeared. He took a bit of killing when once aboard, in spite of his shell shock. I beat him twice and again over the head with an oar, and still he gaped at me! And what teeth! The men had pike steaks for breakfast the next day.

*M.K.N.*

*August 6th,* *Nijni Kitsa.*

The men's rations are getting worse and worse. Yesterday, they had per man, two slices of bread and two biscuits, two dates in lieu of jam, and lard in lieu of margarine! The amount of pilfering that occurs on the lines of communication is almost incredible. The A.S.C. and Russians manage to dispose of any amount of food. The other day, two A.S.C. Serjeants were put under arrest for "skolkering," which means bartering the troops rum with the civilians of Ust Vaga. That sort of thing is done all the way down the line, as well as thieving. The result is, that by the time these base hogs and Ruskies have had their pick, there is precious little for the fighting troops.



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We get a daily complaint from the men, and are powerless to rectify it. Naylor sends in a daily complaint to the Colonel who forwards it to Brigade, but never is there an adequate answer given, nor compensation for shortage. It is not giving the men a chance. It is boring enough to sit in a god-forsaken little village, week in week out, with nothing to do and nothing to look forward to, but it is infinitely worse to have to put up with it on an empty stomach.

The men, of course, never grouse. They take the shortage very philosophically, and pull my leg about full rations. What annoys me is that I cannot give them a reason for it, neither can anyone else.

In barracks, when orderly officer, I have known men come up to me and ask truculently, "Is this a ration for a man." There is no sign of that attitude here, thank heaven.

We have heard that "Bingo" B has had to lose his leg. The doctors apparently, had to operate and sew up his arteries. They hoped the veins would keep the leg alive, which they failed to do. It's too sad for words. I can't bear to think of him mained for life, for the sake of a bloody Bolo.

This life is getting a bit hard. I've no doubt that we should all be mad if it was not for the wonderful good fellowship that exists in the mess. We are always laughing, thanks to the humourists, Philip Booth and Jack Holberton of the 11th Regiment.

The good we are doing seems to be infinitesimal, and that is the sad part. We can't have helped the loyalists much though some of them have proved to be very far from loyal.

The rains have started. We had a terrific storm yesterday, and it has been drizzling continuously all to-day. I hope the river will rise and allow the routine boats up to Seltso, because then the men's rations will probably improve.

We have had no news of "D" Company. It is possible that they were sent to the Onega, where the Russians turned Bolshevik.

*B.H.A.N.*

*August 9th.* *Nijni Kitsa.*

How wonderful your letter sounds, with Lords, an Eton Ball, and Peace Celebrations. We are going to teach the Bolo how to celebrate Peace soon, from all outward and visible signs.

There is a battle going on now on the Dvina, and probably Sadleir-Jackson's men will try to cut off the Bolos in front of us, by a cross march through the forest. Then we shall have to attack in front, to keep them busy both ways.



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In any case the next six weeks are going to be pretty sticky in two senses, scrapping and wet weather. The rains have begun in earnest, so the Staff has chosen this as the best time to bump the enemy. Nothing like making war real to the participants! For two months we sat still on our hunkers under cloudless skies, waiting for action. Now, a continuous downpour; attack!!

I should have loved to have seen the Peace March through London. Yes, the colours; I can't imagine how anyone can resist saluting them. They are the history of a regiment on a faded piece of silk. When I saw the 'LII' Colours at Cowley, I visualised a muster of all the men who had served, each in their period uniform, and thought what a grand sight they would make.

I was sorry to see that the Regiment was not represented. "Shiny" Horley and "Stringy" Blyth went to Paris, to carry the "LII" in the March through the Arc de Triomphe.

Our heavy kit has been packed and sent down to Archangel. My own opinion is that we shall make an offensive, under cover of which we shall hand over to the Russians, and then retire gracefully to England.

*M.K.N.*

*August 10th.* *Nijni Kitsa.*

The wound is still open, but is closing very gradually and somewhat painfully. It is horrid having the dressing pulled off twice a day. To-day, there was a grand push on the Dvina in pouring rain, and the next move is that 2,500 men are going to cross from the Dvina to the Vaga and take the Bolo in the rear. A Russian regiment and the 43rd are going to bump him in front at the same time. I expect that most of the sticky work will be done by the Russians, and we shall support them. If all goes well, it ought to be a good show, and you have no cause to be anxious on my account.

I hope to goodness we shall not suffer heavy casualties. Our mess has reached such a pitch of good fellowship that I shudder at the prospect of losing anyone. We are never at a loss for a laugh; in fact my sides often ache with the pain of laughing.

Thank you for your words of good cheer. It is not pleasant being wounded. There is always the ensuing shock to be contended with. On both occasions I've been hit at close range, and my nerves are not what they were, worse luck. As a result, I have a childish dread of the forest and find it harder every day to force myself forward. I imagine another ambush in every thicket, like the fool I am. I wish I had not got



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this ribbon. I know within me that I am not worth it and its presence on my jacket lessens the value of the cross.

*August* 11*th.*

Another wet and miserable day. The news from the Dvina is still good ; 900 prisoners and 13 guns. The Bolo must have got the wind up considerably. The river is rising too, thank the Lord.

*R.J.N.N.*

*August* 11*th.* *Nijni Kitsa.*

Thank you for all the parcels which have arrived lately. In one came the two volumes of the *Spectator* which I revel in at odd moments.

You ask about the river transport. Since the end of June boats have been unable to come up the Vaga at all. You must remember that the Vaga is much smaller than the Dvina ; the bed is broad and consequently the river is shallow. A rowing boat grounds, crossing from Seltso, and it is not more than 5 feet deep anywhere at present. The rations and mails have been coming up from Beresnik by convoy. Each has a guard of ten men and we have to trust to luck that the Bolo won't raid the convoys. The Russian drivers of the drosky carts are past-masters at the art of pinching food in transit. Adequate supervision is impossible when there are 60 carts to look after ; and the drivers dig into the cases, and hide their thefts at the halts somewhere in the forest, and retrieve them on the homeward journey. Mason, the Quartermaster, has opened cases of maconochie and found a deficiency of a dozen tins, though to outward appearance the cases were intact. Our mess stores seldom come up with less than a 50 per cent. loss in whisky. If all the stores are stacked on a boat, it is quite easy to guard them, whereas a convoy stretches over a mile or more.

You ask for our objective on this front. I don't know of any. We are here primarily to prevent the Bolo from threatening the lines of communication by holding the confluence of the Dvina and Vaga.

The latest news from the Dvina is 1,500 prisoners and 12 guns. It is splendid news, and will give the Bolo something to think about.

Distances. There is a boat ferry opposite Seltso, whence a track of about a mile and a half leads to Mala Beresnik. On this bank a mile between Seltso and Koslovo (where Wakeford, the Sapper, built a very useful bridge) and from the latter to this spot is another three-quarters of a mile. The tracks connecting the villages are dusty, or very muddy, according to the weather.



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*August 12th.*

The attack on this front has been definitely cancelled. The weather has been so bad lately that the forest tracks have become impassable, and the flanking troops unable to negotiate them. There is a feeling that we shall soon shorten our lines of communication, and withdraw from these parts. Admiral Koltchak has been a failure this summer, and no advance of ours on these two rivers can avail him aught.

The wound is, at last, making headway, and showing signs of healing. It has been a long job, owing to sepsis.

*B.H.A.N.*

*August 14th.* *Nijni Kitsa.*

We had a good laugh off "Bolo" Lowndes the other night. It happened like this:—

A waiter appeared towards the end of dinner and told Naylor that there was an urgent message from a corporal of "Bolo's" platoon who reported having seen General Denikin's kite balloon riding in the sky to the S.E. of the Brown Patch! Naylor, thinking that there must be an outbreak of lunacy in the Company, went out and spoke to the corporal. Meanwhile, "Bolo" had a somewhat startled and sheepish look on his face.

When Naylor returned we all shouted, "What's up?" "Nothing, really. But, Bolo, what on earth have you been telling the men? The corporal said you had told him on Sunday that General Denikin was operating somewhere beyond the Brown Patch."

Shrieks of "Come on, Bolo, let's have it," created a pandemonium. "Well, ma-a-an," our inimitable "Bolo" replied, "I was walking round the trenches last Sunday, and found the men reading all the murder stories in the *News of the World*, and I thought that was jolly bad for them. So I called them together, and gave them a lecture on the situation and just told them that in the direction of the Brown Patch General Denikin was operating in the Ukraine, and General Yudenitch away over Mala Beresnik, in Latvia and Esthonia. That's all."

"But, Bolo, did you tell them that Denikin in the Ukraine was about 2,000 miles away and Yudenitch 1,500 miles?" Naylor asked.

"No, m-a-an, I forgot," he confessed.

Thereafter, hell was let loose, and amidst the shrieks of laughter, I heard "Bolo" asking in a high pitched voice, "Have none of you chaps ever made a mistake?" which was answered by yells of "No!!!"



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Actually, of course, the balloon belonged to the Dvina Force, about 50 miles away!

"Bolo" is absolutely marvellous and takes our ragging very well. His pyjamas are patterned with tigers out of compliment to "Clemenceau, le tigre, m-a-a-n" as he says. I don't know what we should do without him.

The other day at breakfast, for instance, in emphasising an argument on international finance with his fist, he hit the edge of his plate of biscuit porridge and capsized all the contents into his lap amid hoots of applause. He's a good chap and amazingly good-natured.

*M.K.N.*

*August 15th.*

It is more than extraordinary that you should have "felt" that I had been hit again. I remember you once wrote to me about the "feeling" when we were at La Bassée. I wonder if it is telepathy or a psychic revelation. Anyway, it is very odd. The wound is not right yet. It has sudden relapses to sepsis which entail hot fomentations. It would not have mattered so much if it had been the right arm, for I should have one whole arm at any rate. The right is still too weak to be called useful. The orderly who dresses me thinks it will be another six weeks before it is healed.

Anything duller than the life here cannot well be imagined. It seems a complete waste of life to sit here for months on end with only the prospect of staying for still more months. The news from the Dvina is still good. The latest is a gunboat sunk and 59 Bolos captured.

The river has risen seventeen inches since the wet weather started, but another 31 are required before a boat can reach Seltso.

*R.J.N.N.*

*August 20th.* *Koslovo.*

We have just got the papers of July 24th-30th. There seems to have been wind up about the mutiny of the Slavo-British Legion. I expect you saw a correspondent's account of our raid of June 26th, and his description of the "Intrepid Colonel Dodington." We are amused at his remark about the mosquitoes: "they were more of a nuisance than the Bolo shells." He was seen by someone making straight for the forest when the Bolos opened fire, and as far as I know, no one saw him again. We are very sick at the articles in the "——" One says that the new troops are not so good as the old



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category men. That is not doing us justice, though no end of harm was done by telling the troops that they would be back before winter, and by stuffing them with "summer picnic" balderdash. We haven't really had a chance to do anything very wonderful, and the Bolo has had a year in which to organise his forces. The category men were faced by an unorganised mob, without any discipline or training. Our men are all young and partially trained. Only about half of my platoon had been in action before! I can't bear these aspersions being cast on the name of the 43rd, though we are only that in name. There has been friction between a captain of another company and the Colonel, as is almost inevitable where regiments are mixed and formed into one.

We have very few Russians to deal with here. Those that came up to Nijni Kitsa were promptly disarmed by Naylor and relegated to digging trenches. They could not even do that proficiently.

I had a party sent to me one day to dig in my platoon area. I gave the officer the task, and started them off. On my return about an hour later I found that they had done nothing since I left, and the officer in charge had disappeared. So, I made signs to get them to work, but they only laughed at me. That got my goat; in front of me was the protruding posterior of an idler, so I took three sharp paces forward and rooted him good and hearty up the bottom. The rest of his comrades thought my action very funny, but started to work with a will. After that there was no more idling and the task was well and truly done. That just shows that you cannot treat these Russian troops like your own.

We are reduced by half our strength now. Three platoons of "C" Company have departed under Meade, 43rd, for Yemetskoe, which is half way between Beresnik and Ust Pinega, leaving "A" and "B" Companies to do the front line work. Nijni is now held by three platoons and my platoon and a Russian platoon are holding this village.

The Doctor came up to-day and dressed my wound. It is not going very well. All the new skin that had formed with such difficulty has softened and gone septic.

After lunch we sent down our reserve ammunition for evacuation down the line. We are now left with a bare necessity in case of trouble.

*B.H.A.N.*

*August 20th.* *Koslovo.*

A letter from you arrived yesterday, plus a parcel containing a most excellent cake and books, etc. No more oil of citronella is wanted now, because the mosquitoes have all



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been drowned in this terrible rainy weather, and we can now sleep quite comfortably without a net.

You seem to have had frightful wind up when you wrote this letter dated July 25th. The papers have made a terrific cry about the mutiny of the Slavo-British Legion, doubtless in order to rouse public opinion in England and force the Government to do something. I'm wondering what the "——" correspondent will say about this show on the Dvina where 2,000 Bolos have been taken prisoners and 16 guns captured in the initial assault of the Dvina Force. They are still chasing the Bolo; and I hear that our river fleet have sighted the Bolo fleet high and dry on sandbanks within range of the field guns.

What will the correspondent say about that? In his account of our raid of the 26th he proved himself a trifle inaccurate, when he said that the mosquitoes were more noisome than the enemy's shells. We all have our doubts about his flight into the forest when the Bolo guns opened. The mosquitoes were a damned sight worse in the forest than on the road from which he fled. It was doubtless the "whizz-bang" mosquito rather than the variety with wings that frightened him most!

The Government in truckling to Labour have sent us out here expecting wonderful results without casualties. If casualties are at all heavy, an engagement is to be broken off. The situation is hopeless. Future operations have been known to have been discussed at Beresnik weeks before materialization. We, on the column, have been kept in the dark rightly enough, up to six hours before action, while people behind the line have been discussing the show for weeks. The Bolo, therefore, has known of our shows before we, who do them, know of them ourselves!

The expedition in its origin savoured more of politics than war, whatever the politicians may say to deny it. As a political venture, it has proved to be like every other one of its kidney and the Government is mortally afraid of public opinion. It is easy to see how the Russians regard the situation. They know that all security ceases on our departure and, therefore, that it is wiser to propitiate the Bolos by desertion and treachery before, rather than by apologies after our evacuation, in order to preserve their necks intact. It is very bad luck on many who are loyal.

We are not at war with the Bolos, yet we are fighting them; and as Germany has signed peace, our only excuse for fighting the Bolos has ceased to exist. As with Turkey in the Nineteenth Century, we have backed the wrong horse!



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I am very sorry that all of you at home should have been so anxious on our behalf. Wind is always far more vertical the further you get from the front line. In March 1918, the only people who were thoroughly optimistic or philosophically indifferent were the front line troops, while the wind in rear was strong enough to be called a gale. The story of the mutiny only made our soldiers think rather less of the Russians than before, and that was nix! It takes more than a mutiny on another river to disturb us on this benighted column.

I am not considered fit to command this place with my platoon and a platoon of Russians, so a captain from "B" Company has been sent over from the other bank, and I am his subordinate. However, Holland is with me. He has been attached to my platoon for some time and is a right good fellow. He had a brother killed at Beaumont-Hamel with the 52nd.

The wound, so far from healing, is getting worse if anything. The Doctor put on raw iodine which softened the skin and turned it septic again, and caused other septic sores to break out all round the original wound. The Doctor has only just qualified, and has had no experience of wounds. However, it does not matter much, except that it's uncomfortable.

*M.K.N.*

*August 21st.* *Koslovo.*

The weather has turned perfectly damnable. For the last 10 days we have had almost incessant rain and the whole country is soggy with water. The river has risen four feet, and yet a boat has not come up to Seltso.

Two days ago I took a patrol three and half miles into the forest. We had to form a covering party for a gunner observation officer. The Bolo position on this bank is at Kitsa, about four and a half miles from Nijni Kitsa. We had to take out telephone wire and wait for two hours while the F.O.O. spotted. The going was pretty bad as the track was a running stream ankle deep in places. Luckily the rain which was pouring down when we started held off until we returned. But there was a continuous drip of water from the trees which sounded like distant machine gun fire. I am very glad we did not meet any Bolos; I was feeling far from hearty. The observing officer sat up in a tree, but only saw a few shots burst owing to the very bad visibility.

The wound is no better. I don't think it will improve until I can rest it and wear my arm in a sling.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*August 22nd*, 1919. *Koslovo.*

I woke up this morning, and distinctly thought I heard cocks crowing across the river. I could not understand what the noise was, for there are no fowls anywhere near us. On looking out of the window, I realized that it came from the Gunner Lines where the Russians were hauling out the old 60-pounder. After breakfast, Holland and I went across the floating bridge and watched the proceedings. The British labourer has the reputation for doing the minimum work in the maximum time, but he at least makes a pretence of work; not so the Russian who never reaches that stage. There were about 40 men standing round, who did nothing else but escort the gun when the pair of horses managed to shift it a foot or two. At a given signal from an officer, about 20 men stood to the drag-ropes; singing, shouting or grunting in unison they leant on the ropes without straining a muscle, but had a pandemonium been able to shift the gun, it would have rolled on to the raft of its own volition. Two officers stood and watched, while in the offing two subalterns engaged in a little horse-play, kicking each other's bottoms like a couple of school boys, in full view of their men who stopped pulling on the ropes in order to watch them! A typical example of the sense of duty of the Russian officer!

The only men who did any real work were two British battery serjeants who had to contend, not only with the gun, but also with the Russian team who invariably did the opposite of what was required of them. When the wheels got firmly stuck in the sand of the river bed, the driver lashed his two unfortunate horses unmercifully. I guarantee that the same number of Englishmen would have done the job in half the time; as it was, the Russians started at 6 a.m. and it was past 3 p.m. before the gun had been dismantled and lashed to the rafts. We shall feel the loss of that old 60-pounder. She outranged any gun the Bolo has, and could drop her "packets" on their back areas at Ignatovskaya and Maximovskaya. She also kept their guns at a respectful distance from our lines.

These Russian officers are, apparently, completely unreliable. "Tiger" told me a story of one Russian subaltern in Carroll's "Hell Fire" Cavalry. He was ordered to take out a patrol into the forest and make a reconnaissance of a certain junction of forest rides and see if there were any signs of a recent Bolo occupation. The patrol set out, and the subaltern duly handed in a very detailed report the following morning stating that the junction was occupied, and attached a sketch map showing a blockhouse position with a machine gun. This



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information surprised the Staff exceedingly and another patrol was sent out under a British subaltern to the same spot. The latter reported that the junction was unoccupied and that there were no traces of the Bolo ever having been there! Thereupon, the Russian subaltern was confronted with his report and asked to give an explanation. He admitted, quite frankly, that he had never been to the place himself for the simple reason that he did not consider it an officer's job to take 10 men on patrol: that as soon as he had found the track he had handed over the job to a corporal. The latter never found the place, and, fearing to return empty-handed, had concocted the story from a fertile imagination. The officer was not at all ashamed of his dereliction of duty. We have yet to find out what a Russian officer can or will do!

The Russian men are all right if properly led, as Watson's and Tamplin's men have proved over and over again. Watson and Tamplin are the two Intelligence Officers attached to this column. They have both lived most of their lives in Russia.

Practically every week one of them takes a mounted party to find out what is happening behind the Bolo lines. They start off with seven days' rations and ride down the wide rides cut north and south through the forest, to localize forest fires, I believe. They make a rendezvous, and a couple of the gang trek off in the evening and drift into a village and get into conversation with the Bolos. In all the villages behind the lines they know of sympathisers who are ready to hand on information, and report the presence or otherwise of important commissars. On one occasion the whole party of eight came to the outskirts of a village at about midnight when it was still dusk. They formed into line and cantered down the village street, firing their revolvers as they went. This naturally awakened the inhabitants who rushed out of their shacks to see what the fuss was about. The party then wheeled about at the end of the street and galloped back shooting down the particular commissars whom they knew to be somewhere in the village.

By such ruses they have caught some useful specimens of the genus "commissar" and carried them off into the forest. But as their prisoners have never been brought back to our lines, one can only guess that they met their fate in the forest as soon as all useful information had been extracted from them. As a result of these incursions, big prices have been put on the heads of the Intelligence party; and these increase in value after each successful raid. They give no quarter as they expect none themselves if they are captured by the Bolos. I don't think their stories of their adventures are flights of fancy, for the information they glean precludes that.



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*R.J.N.N.*

*August 29th.* *Koslovo.*

A mail of terrific proportions came up on the 26th, bringing me four letters and eight parcels from you. I write with the fragrant aroma of an Anco cigar filling the room. Your prunes, almonds, raisins, and chocolate I keep as an emergency ration until the next parcel arrives when I eat up the old ones. My Gawd! How lovely it is—honey! and a huge cake. Last night we had plum pudd'n, and excellent it was too! To-day apple pudd'n, no less excellent. Out of it all, I feel rather a fraud; I came to please myself and therefore I have no right to grouse at our rations. But it is sickening to find, day after day, that the men's rations are 50 per cent. short. In France one felt that one was doing something to help England; here in this howling silence, one hasn't even got that satisfaction. It looks very much as if we are the dupes of this shifty Government.

The mutinies, thank God, have not affected us on this column. However, they are nasty enough things to hear of, let alone experience.

Before this letter reaches you, you will probably have read in the papers of the withdrawal to Archangel. We are expecting to go soon now.

"Tiger" Wyld came over on the 26th and gave me sufficient news to cause a rift in this cloud of monotony. In a few days' time, we shall be going back to Archangel. "A" and "B" Companies, now holding the line, are going to form the rear-guard of the whole Dvina and Vaga Forces. Owing to the rains and the rise in the river, the fleet will be able to move all right. Up till now they have been out of action, anchored in deep pools in the Dvina, as you surmised, unable to move forward or back. The Dvina Force will be able to retire under cover of this great success they had the other day.

"Tiger" told me that the Bolos will have to cover 15 versts before they find out that our troops have gone, which will mean a lapse of twelve hours and sufficient time for us to evacuate. Not so on this river. On the left bank, the Bolo is only 2,000 yards away and he has a pretty shrewd idea that we are going soon from Russian deserters. The other day two serjeants and eight men of the Russian gun battery deserted. This is the policy of many now serving on our side.

They know that the Bolo will catch them in the end, and that a timely desertion now, may in some way atone for the crime of having fought against him. The same applies to many civilians behind our lines, who are now showing Bolshevik tendencies to cover themselves.



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Rumour has it that the people in Archangel are distinctly Bolo, and we may have trouble.

Having acted as rearguard we shall embark at Beresnik and go straight through to Archangel, picking up the 67th and our Companies on the way. On our arrival we shall re-form as a Brigade and hold the right flank of the line which the Russians intend to defend when we've gone.

The withdrawal has been greatly delayed by the state of the river and shortage of tugs to remove the stores and dumps. Also, the Russian higher command is very undecided on the line to be held.

"Tiger" also told me that two battalions of Marines and the 74th were on their way to Archangel.

I'm awfully glad Ironside has been given the K.C.B. He has had a truly rotten job to do. All and everything that he has done has been openly discussed and criticised by the Press; and now his future plans are disclosed too. On the two occasions on which I have seen him, he inspired me with the greatest confidence which is more than many Generals did in France.

The second occasion was on the eve of our first raid. The Colonel had had orders to send 65 men from his three Companies to Headquarters at Beresnik at once, to act as guards to the valuable persons of some of the Staff. This meant a considerable depletion of the bayonets available for the raid, and he told Ironside. The latter, then and there, overruled the order. The average General would say he would look into it, and that would be as far as he'd go. Not so Ironside. He has done the hell of a lot on this campaign, and worked hard for his troops. We have felt his departure from the forward area, and his immediate command. We now suffer under a strange Brigadier miles away on the Dvina.

Koltchak's failure has reduced us to nonentities here. There is no point in our advancing to Kutlas while he is retreating to Vladivostok. So long as he was advancing we were a sharp thorn in the Bolo's side.

We are now getting normal nights. Twilight lasts from 8 to 10 p.m., and then an inky blackness falls till 3 a.m. Starlight nights are bringing the first signs of Master Jack Frost. The interminable green of the forest is now being tinged with the first soft shades of yellow. The topmost branches of the silver birches are beginning to fade. The undergrowth is a mass of red moss, whortleberries, cranberries, and bilberries, and aren't they good eating? I went for a stroll in the forest the other day in the hope of seeing a capercailzie, blackcock or rabshikkie. It was a very wet but wonderful walk. I tramped across swamps carpeted with this blood-red moss



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which gave the impression of treading on sponges. Then I came to a piece of very thick forest where trails went off in every direction. I had hoped to find some spoor of bigger stuff than birds, but was unsuccessful.

There was, in some places, a kind of lichen on the ground. To see a clearing at a distance covered with this, made me think there was a lake beaten up into foam by a high wind.

The chance of running into Bolos on this bank is exceedingly small. However, I had an automatic as well as my gun.

The birches are lovely, standing like silver sentinels among the dreary pines. They are tall and graceful and I love the way the breeze sighs through their leaves. The forest is awe-inspiring. I feel how puny a man is, compared to this forest, stretching for miles and miles, to almost incomprehensible distances, and to whose vastness a man is no bigger than a louse.

To-day, we did a most amusing thing. This column had to make a demonstration to synchronise with an attack elsewhere, and deceive the Bolo into thinking it was coming on this front. Accordingly, I marched my platoon up to Nijni Kitsa to take part. We had to march in single file down a road under observation by the Bolo, turn left under cover at the bottom, climb up the hill again behind some shacks, and appear on the crest as a different platoon. Sawyer's platoon went out as a mock advance guard to the Brown Patch, while Booth and I did the stage work by marching round in circles in the hope that the Bolos would see us and think that a terrific force was advancing against them. We all laughed very heartily, including the Colonel who was watching.

Meanwhile, the guns were plastering the Bolo line with all manner of frightfulness, and a platoon went out from Mala Beresnik and gave him a dose of .303 from a Lewis gun, to complete the illusion.

As a piece of bluff, I hope it was successful. If not, we were amused; and that is worth a lot in these days.

We are very comfortable in this little village. There is precious little to do, and all day to do it in. We are half way between Nijni Kitsa and Seltso, on a bluff overlooking the river. A wonderful view of the forest is obtained from the window of our bedroom.

*B.H.A.N.*

*August 30th.* *Koslovo.*

There was an attack, yesterday, on the Railway Front, in which 350 Bolos and all their guns were captured.



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"Tiger" Wyld was full of the Dvina attack. Our troops got well behind the Bolo, and, if the weather had not been so bad, would have rounded up the whole force and cut off the Bolos on this front. As it was, the cavalry and guns and rations were bogged for 48 hours. The Bolo fleet was caught anchored in pools, unable to move forward or back, and quite ready to surrender. But when they saw that we had no guns to pound them with, they fought hard and did a good deal of damage. Just a piece of bad luck prevented the show from being a decisive victory. The Bolo sailors fought well apparently, but with their usual cruelty. They killed an English colonel by a direct hit with an 18-pounder, and when they landed, they stripped him of his clothes, cut his throat and castrated him. That shows what savages they are.

*M.K.N.*

*September 3rd.* *Koslovo.*

The last two days have been thrilling beyond all expectations of this campaign. The show which I am going to try and describe to you started on the 31st. It was a glorious sunny Sunday morning. Everything seems to start on a Sunday in war.

The Bolo suddenly opened artillery fire on Mala Beresnik from guns which, from the sound of the shell, seemed to be quite close up. It was a heavy fire lasting from 1 p.m. till after 8. I went up to Nijni Kitsa and watched the shelling through glasses. We had an excellent view across the river on to the Pimple post, and it seemed to us that the Bolo was cutting wire along the trench system. Also, from Nijni Kitsa it was quite obvious that the Bolo had guns forward on this bank where he has never had them before. These particular guns were enfilading our trenches across the river.

We talked it over and came to the conclusion that the enemy was probably under the impression that we had shinned off in the night as had been originally arranged. We rang up Mala Beresnik and found out that there had been only one casualty after all the shelling, and he was a Russian gunner! For the first time, too, the Bolo brought a 6-inch howitzer into action which lobbed its damnable crumps all round Fort Garry. However, Peck, commanding "B" Company, told us that it had done no damage whatsoever!

The night that followed was strangely quiet. I was on duty in the early watches of the morning. The air was crisp and the ground crackled under foot. An arc of light spread right across the northern sky, from which shot tongues of dancing light rather like gunflashes at night, yet more piercingly



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bright, more sparkling. It was as if the world was crowned with a tiara of fire diamonds. The fiery facets flickered and flashed, darted among the needle points of the pines, faded, and then flashed again, but always from the same encompassing arc. It was a magnificent sight.

Holland and I were late in getting up on the 1st, having spent most of the night wandering round the posts. At 9.15 when in the middle of shaving, I heard a bugle call and a yell from the direction of Mala Beresnik, followed closely by a shrieking salvo of whizzbangs and a barrage of machine gun fire. A second later, I heard the unmistakable pop and blast of our trench mortars, and then below my window on the other bank the gunners started those friendly little 18-pounders barking: the guns were firing rapid on the S.O.S. lines!

There seemed to be no immediate cause for alarm, so I continued my shaving while "Holly" rolled on his puttees. At this moment, Captain S—— of the Royal Warwicks who is in command here, rushed in and shouted "They're attacking. Don't you realise that they're attacking." "Holly" looked up, and with a whimsical smile asked, "Are they attacking us?" Thereat our Captain S disappeared down the stairs with a clatter, still shouting out "They're attacking. Hurry up." Anyway, he was right, they had attacked, but there was no need for us to get the wind up till they attacked us!

Soon after breakfast, our signallers gave us the news that all communication with Ust Vaga had been cut. This made us sit up and take notice.

The battle in Mala Beresnik had not been raging more than 10 minutes when I received an order from Regimental Headquarters to lead my platoon across the river and stay at the Gunner Lines to act as a reserve in case of need. I handed over the defences of Koslovo to the Sappers and Russians and was ready to move at 9.45.

As we descended the bluff to Wakeford's bridge, we passed some specimens of our so-called Russian Allies idling on the cliff overlooking the bridge. Amidst roars of laughter they shouted to my troops, "Plenty Bolo, plenty Bolo." A man at the back of the party, however, did not see the joke in the same light as these braves, and retorted, "We'll give you plenty Bolo when we come back, you lousy sons of guns." So we got the last laugh!

Having crossed the bridge to the Gunner Lines, I reported to the officer in command for instructions. But he could give me none, as the lines to Mala Beresnik were still "dis." However, the line was mended by 11 a.m., and we heard that the Bolos had come over through the rye fields and been mown down by our machine guns and trench mortars.



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At about 11.15 a message came through from Peck, saying that about 200 Bolos had been spotted jibbering and arguing the toss in the forest, and that he wanted me to come up and disperse them. So it looked as if "yours truly" was going to have another forest encounter!

I met Peck on arrival in Canadian Village who told me that a patrol had gone out and brought back information. They had found the Bolos just in front of our wire in dead ground, digging in like rabbits. They chased them out and took one man prisoner, found lying doggo in the rye. They had pursued to the edge of the forest, where they found about 200 Bolos forming up for a second attack. The officer in charge of the patrol returned immediately to the trench mortars, gave them the exact position of the enemy and waited for the bombs to do the rest.

Fifteen rounds rapid, fired straight into the jabbering mob of Bolos, produced the desired effect, and they dispersed to healthier climes for the time being. I was therefore not required for the moment to do anything, except remain as a reserve.

At lunch time a situation report arrived from Seltso and we soon realised why the line to Ust Vaga was not working. The garrison of the latter consisted of 1 platoon and Headquarters of "C" Company, 2 machine gun sections, personnel of A.S.C. and R.A.M.C. and one company of Russians, desertions from which had become a daily occurrence. The two blockhouses guarding the Moscow Road to Mala Beresnik were held by British machine gunners and the rest of the perimeter by the Russians. At 2.30 a.m. some civilians led in a party of 190 Bolos and cavalry under the command of a notorious cavalryman, who styled himself the "Red Eagle."

This party had trekked through the forest, cut the telephone wire to Seltso, and then quietly entered through the lines held by the Russians, who afterwards reported that they had neither seen nor heard anything unusual! Having entered the defences along the river bank from the north, they proceeded to attack the British posts facing south, from the rear, captured one crew and killed the other.

Next, they were led to the houses of the British officers and troops. These had been marked by bunches of red mountain ash berries, and were quietly surrounded. Luckily, the sentry of the Headquarters' guard spotted them, retired and bolted the door and gave the alarm. But no alarm was needed, for at that moment a bomb exploded against the wall of the shack. By the grace of God, the aim was faulty, or the officers would now be carolling on harps. Then the siege began by the enemy opening fire at the windows and trying to force an entry up the ramp to the loft at the back



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of the shack. But here two old soldiers had some good snapshooting practice on live targets, and kept the attackers off mighty successfully.

In the officers' bedroom, the windows were manned and the compliment was returned! The Company Serjeant-Major, a good shot, quickly picked off some of the better looking Bolshies, and the latter gradually retired.

The "Red Eagle" had omitted to cut the wires connecting the Headquarters' shack with the hospital and A.S.C., and thus *Major Northcote was able to keep in touch and direct operations.

No sooner had the Bolos retired to a respectful distance, than the British officers, clad in pyjamas and gum boots, turned out the men of the platoon—who had been left severely alone by the Bolos— and led a counter-attack, and drove off those surrounding the shack of the doctor, who had been doing manful work with a shot gun for lack of a better weapon, and after four hours of darned hard fighting, cleared all the enemy out of the village, killing sixteen and taking five prisoners. Our casualties were four killed and a few wounded. Our two machine guns, which had been captured, were later found in the forest, abandoned by their captors in their flight.

Beck, also of the 11th Regiment, had a revolver duel with the "Red Eagle" in the street. They both emptied their chambers but neither scored a hit!

Another officer, alone in a shack which was surrounded by Bolos, lay doggo and managed to escape. There were so many instances of luck, heroism and pluck, that I cannot mention them all in this.

The greatness of the achievement, to a great degree, lay in the fact that the village is long and straggling, and required much mopping up. A party of very determined Bolos held the block-houses at the south end. One of these, especially, gave a lot of trouble, situated as it was on the river bank and right in the open. From it, the Bolos enfiladed our troops in all attempts to clear the rest of the village. In the end it had to be systematically attacked and the occupants killed. They never showed any sign of surrender.

The enemy's plan had been to take Ust Vaga and then surround Mala Beresnik and mop it up. The forces used against us were, 600 against Mala Beresnik and 200 against Ust Vaga. The former had come up on the night of the 31st, and lain outside our wire, waiting for the signal—the fall of Ust Vaga—to attack. This was gleaned from the prisoners.

The right bank had been considerably weakened by the dispatch of my platoon to Mala Beresnik, and another com-

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* *For his action this day Major Northcote was awarded the D.S.O.*



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posite platoon under Drake, composed of Headquarter employ, which had trekked off to Ust Vaga to mend the line.

The situation was pretty critical if the Bolo attacked on both banks again.

Soon after lunch, Bolos were spotted moving about in the rye fields in front of the Pimple. A gunner officer shinned up a tree and turned his guns on to them and shot them up properly. From then onwards all was quiet, and a patrol went out and picked up a badly wounded platoon commander. The patrol counted sixteen dead in front of our wire, most neatly laid out by our trench mortars. There must have been a good many dead and wounded in the forest as well.

At the time of the initial attack, the Bolos put down a barrage which, like ours on June 26th, fell very neatly slap into their own advancing line.

The night of the 1st/2nd was rather windy, until a platoon of the 46th Royal Fusiliers arrived on the 2nd and relieved me. They had marched up to Ust Vaga from Beresnik on the sound of rifle fire, and had then been sent on to us.

On my return to Koslovo I found another platoon of the 46th, but they left to-day as soon as our platoon of "C" Company had arrived from Ust Vaga and taken over. From Northcote and *Gibbons I heard all the stories of the epic fight, and by Jove, it was a very narrow shave!

Anyway, this show has done one good thing; it has woken the Brigadier up to the fact that this column does exist and has some importance. If we had all been scuppered here, he at any rate, would have been in the cart.

The Bolo prisoners, taken at Mala Beresnik, have stated that it was known that we were holding this front very lightly, but it was also thought that we had Russian troops as well. They had been told that the latter, on hearing the shout and bugle, would mutiny and shoot up "B" Company from within.

Unluckily for them, but fortunately for "B" Company, there were no Russians in Mala Beresnik!

The situation is now restored. All the Russians have been turned out of the forward areas and two companies of Fusiliers are holding Ust Vaga. We are a match for the Bolos in front.

Even the Russian gunners have cleared off; and we now have a section of Russian guns manned by English gunners. The Russians pulled out English 18-pounders, and our present gunners know practically nothing about their Russian guns. It is so typical of the way things are done!

Very good work was done by an airman and his observer.

*Lieut. Gibbons was awarded the M.C. for his gallantry.*



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When the firing in Ust Vaga was heard in Beresnik, he hopped into his aeroplane and flew up the river, spotted what was happening in the village and reported same. Then he flew up to Seltso and over Mala Beresnik. The gunners asked him to try and spot the positions of the enemy's guns, which had been pulled up close to the perimeter, somewhere in the forest. He circled round like a hawk spying for prey, and seemed unsuccessful; but suddenly we heard the plop-plop of bombs bursting in the forest; a moment later he was flying low over the tree tops towards the Gunner Lines, and we saw him drop a message. The latter was contained in a lady's silk stocking, and read, "Here are four co-ordinates: found the little illegitimates at last, but more important than that, is that you return this stocking as soon as possible. 'Taffy'."

That is the broad outline of the show; but there are many stories I could tell about individual experiences of the officers at Ust Vaga. Perhaps even from this you will be able to see how ticklish the situation was at one time. We, up here, were undoubtedly saved by the magnificent defence of "C" Company and the odds and ends. Though the Bolos would never have taken these positions by attacks, shortage of food and ammunition might easily have given them what they wanted without fighting, had Ust Vaga fallen.

My wound is still septic. When I went to the Aid Post at Mala Beresnik to have it dressed, the Doctor put my arm in a splint and sling and told me that it would never heal unless I kept it quiet. I am terribly handicapped by having a gammy right arm as well.

This must be all for now.

*September 5th.* *Koslovo.*

I walked up to Nijni Kitsa, in the hopes of getting a game of football, and stayed to tea and dinner. Naylor received a message to have two blankets per man rolled: tin hats, and entrenching tools stacked, and sent down to Seltso tomorrow at 6.30 a.m. Officers' kits are to go too. It really looks as if something is doing at last.

The Navy is going to lay mines round the island, and I think we shall withdraw on the 8th or 9th.

*September 7th.* *Koslovo.*

The bloody Bolo is shelling Mala Beresnik again. He has been at it some time now. I suppose the blighter is going to attack again. However, we have more troops this time, and I don't think he will get very far.

He continued his strafe till well past lunch time and then stopped suddenly. Only one man was wounded in Banya post.



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*September 8th.* *Koslovo.*

There was no sign of a Bolo attack when I woke up. I went down to Seltso and met Carter; walked with him to the mess, where the Colonel told me that I should have to hold Koslovo alone on the 10th. After lunch Captain S was called to a conference at 2.30. He came back with the news of a withdrawal on the 10th. I went out into the forest laying bomb traps across the tracks leading to this village. It was rather good fun. If anyone touches the trip wire he will find a bomb fizzing on each side of him. The only trouble was to work the pin sufficiently loose to ensure that the slightest touch would extract it, and allow the lever to fly off.

*R.J.N.N* *Bakharitsa,*

*September 26th.* *Archangel.*

This will reach you at the same time as I; but having nothing better to do I will try to tell you about the closing phase of this show so that you can keep it with the rest of my letters.

The original—or rather one of the many dates fixed for the evacuation of the Vaga front, was the 10th. All had been prepared; the convoy of 70 carts was waiting; and then, just as we were going to bed in anticipation of an early rise, a telephone message came through, cancelling the move till further orders. A terrible gloom spread over the mess; no one spoke until I swore like a division of good infantrymen!

It was bitterly cold, and the stove in our bedroom had 15 lbs. of gun cotton concealed in the chimney as a trap for the Bolos. We heaved this out and lay down on the hard floor while bugs dropped off the ceiling, roused by the warmth of the stove, to seek their food in due season. Outside, an icy north wind whistled round the eaves.

*September 10th.*

As much material had been evacuated as possible. We had rations for one day and the minimum reserve of ammunition, which consisted of 1,000 rounds per platoon and 4,000 per machine gun. After the shelling of Mala Beresnik on the 7th, vain searches were made all over the area for a coil of barbed wire to mend the gaps!

In the evening rations came up for five days; there were no more at Beresnik, except sufficient to take us down to Archangel.

William Giles, Philip and I, walked down to Seltso. It was a clear autumn day with bright sunshine and fleecy clouds. Seltso was like a city of the dead; no one stirred in the street and we failed to glean any information.



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*September 13th.*

I woke up very early to the tune of machine gun fire from Mala Beresnik. A little later we heard trench mortars bursting, and a " stand-to " was ordered. It was a bitterly cold morning, and none of us had a greatcoat to keep out the icy blast. It was quite obvious that there was a battle in the air.

Mala Beresnik wired through the presence of Bolos, and Nijni Kitsa's sentries reported having heard the explosion of trap bombs all round their perimeter. Later, Naylor reported that a strong party had been seen making for Koslovo ! !

Gibbons was soon ordered to go over to Mala Beresnik with his platoon to act as a reserve, leaving me and a few Sappers and " C " Company Headquarters to defend Koslovo.

At 4 a.m. the Bolo started shelling Mala Beresnik again with two guns, and kept up an intermittent fire all day until 4 p.m., when it stopped suddenly. Peck reported that Banya post had been knocked in and one man slightly wounded as a result.

The wind, which had been almost vertical all day, became a hurricane when our signallers reported that the line to Nijni Kitsa was " dis." Almost at the same moment, a gunner officer appeared and said that he could not get Nijni and was going out with a linesman to mend the break. On the way, he was suddenly accosted by a Bolo, who appeared out of the forest undergrowth waving a white handkerchief from the muzzle of his rifle. He told the officer that there was a big party in the bushes who wanted to surrender. The Bolo patrol had cut the wire ! From this information we deemed it wise to man the defences in case the enemy altered his mind and attacked. But at 7 p.m. Nijni Kitsa wired down the news that 120 Bolos had surrendered to the machine gun post on the rear face of the perimeter.

The N.C.O. in charge had taken no chances and had opened fire as they advanced in a mob, shouting and waving their rifles. They were marched down to us here and taken over by Watson of the Intelligence, and Tom Drake with a platoon of Headquarter ruffians.

While waiting outside our mess, " Trotsky " Trewheller, the Regimental Interpreter, asked the Bolo officer a few questions. The latter was to have attacked us at Koslovo with 120 men while four companies dealt with Nijni Kitsa and six assaulted Mala Beresnik. The officer had been told that Koslovo was held by blockhouses unprotected by wire. His map was 1/400,000 of the whole of Russia, with the position of Koslovo marked thereon in pencil. He had been wandering about in the rain-soaked forest for two days and was thoroughly wet and hungry. He said that he had waited for



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months for this opportunity and, by a pretence of ardent loyalty had earned so cleverly the trust of his superiors, that he had been sent without a commissar to supervise his actions.

The Bolos belonged to the 161st Regiment which had been ordered to attack Mala Beresnik on the 7th and had refused unconditionally to do so! They were a miserable looking lot, ill-fed, unwashed, lousy and odoriferous to a degree. Some of them were stripling boys of hardly sixteen summers, looking tired and cold and wet. The officer, however, in spite of his tattered uniform, was of quite a different stamp altogether; in fact he was a handsome man, a remnant probably of the intelligentsia. Before their departure to attack our impregnable positions at Nijni Kitsa, they had all been encouraged to succeed with a threat of instant death if they failed!

The officer also said that our bomb traps laid in the forest had reduced the men to panic; that it did not seem to matter where they went or how carefully, bombs were always exploding and causing alarm and despondency amongst his unwilling troops, as well as casualties; that one trap had killed the scout officer who was responsible for guiding them to the objective, and that after his demise no one knew the way nor cared.

After the surrender, the wind needle sprang back to normal and the tension of the previous twelve hours relaxed at once. Nijni Kitsa reported twenty-six exploded traps and found plenty of evidence of casualties but no sign of prowling Bolos. On the left bank there was a little rifle fire at night from our patrols chasing the enemy, but otherwise no sign of a renewed concentration.

I wonder what would have happened if the Bolos had attacked Koslovo without any artillery preparation. They must have known what they were up against before they surrendered. We could have slaughtered them like Obadiah! I expect the rest of the regiment had a pretty thin time as a result of this desertion. I can well imagine the Chink commissars at a day of executions!

So ended the 13th, a day of prolonged suspense.

*September* 14*th*.

Our rations were only sufficient for two days, and on this account our hopes for a move rose high. The situation looked a bit precarious: minimum ammunition and trench mortar bombs, thirty rounds of field gun ammunition, and no reserve rations in case the enemy surrounded us.

However, there was a conference in the afternoon; the evacuation orders of the 10th were to apply for to-morrow



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except that the Vaga Column would not act as rearguard for the Dvina Force. In view of all the previous cancellations of the withdrawal, I did not dare hope that we would really go.

Sure enough, at 9.15 p.m., as we were sitting in front of the stove, a message came through, "To-morrow's move will not take place unless further orders are received." My despair was not so black this time, it seemed inevitable.

It was a very cold night; a north wind fairly cut me in two; the ground was white and sparkling in the moonlight and the stars were like a myriad flashing diamonds.

When I came in from duty, I found a message form saying that the move would take place. I turned over on my hard bed and thought of England and wondered whether the Bolo would let us slip away quietly, or whether it would be a running fight.

*September* 15*th.*

Breakfast at 5.15. At 5.30 carts came up from Seltso to take down Lewis gun boxes and cooking utensils.

Then came the fun. We burnt every scrap of English literature, dropped tools, bombs and ammunition into the wells and replaced the gun cotton in the stove of our bedroom, covering it carefully with cold ashes. Next, Wakeford arrived and set the bombs, which were to explode 75 slabs of gun cotton if anyone trod on the corduroy bridge at the south end of the village.

At 8.15 on this frosty sunny morning, "A" Company marched through Koslovo, down the cliff and over the bridge to the Gunner Lines. My platoon was now rearguard and as soon as "A" was clear, we crossed over; behind me, the last man to leave Koslovo, the Sappers started to hack away the anchor ropes.

At 9.25, having stacked packs on carts, "A" Company moved off into the forest towards the Moscow Road. It was a different road to the one we had marched along in June! The air was chill, the birches yellow and the track an inch deep in mud. As for mosquitoes, I had almost forgotten their existence!

Passing through Verchni Konets some old women came out and watched the column, howling and beating their breasts the while, in paroxysms of grief. I hardly felt sorry for them; they or their families have played a double game too long to deserve any pity.

On reaching Ust Vaga at 12.30 p.m., "A" Company took over the defences. The village is a long, straggling settlement, in the centre of which stands the characteristic white church of Russia.



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It does not lend itself to defence and I could see how easy it had been for the Bolos to enter on the 1st.

Our orders were to allow no civilians out of the village during our stay. The bridge on the Mala Beresnik road had been blown up by the Sappers.

During the night, sentries reported having heard big explosions from the direction of our old lines, and we visualised great fat commissars being blown sky high on lighting the stoves or treading on the bridges. But we were very tired withal, for this was the first march since the selfsame trek in June, that anyone had done, and both officers and men soon realised the effect of stagnation. But what did that matter!

*September 16th.*

"B" Company moved off at 6.30, followed by the guns, A.S.C., and Intelligence. The latter took some men and women of known Bolo tendencies, as hostages for the good behaviour of the rest. "A" left at 7.15, No. 4 Platoon escorting the carts, Nos. 1 and 2 main guard, and No. 3 (Charles Lowndes) rear guard, while behind us, in the street of the village, old women keened, throwing themselves down on the road and rolling in hysterical abandon. The defences had been handed over to a body of Russians who styled themselves the Shenkursk Volunteers. When we left, they took no trouble to man the posts but paraded in a body to fire machine guns on the range!

Our route lay along the river bank the whole way, as the short cut through the forest had been reported impassable to artillery and transport.

We had been marching for about three-quarters of an hour when shots rang out in Ust Vaga, and we imagined that the Russians were practising on the range. Not so, really, because at the second halt, a civilian came running up minus his boots, shouting "Bolo, Ust Vaga."

This was most unfortunate, because it just happened that there was a big congestion in the column owing to a morass over which the transport had great difficulty in crossing.

Watson questioned the civilian and reported to the Colonel. Thenceforward we made a forced march in order to obviate a rearguard action. The Shenkursk Volunteers had "beaten" it to Beresnik by the forest track!

We reached Beresnik at noon, and "B" Company embarked at once, followed by Headquarters, "A" Company and Trench Mortar Battery. We were ready to move at 1.30, but it was not to be so.

Aeroplanes reported that the Bolos were within two versts of Beresnik, advancing in two columns. Then a most



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unfortunate thing occurred; a barge containing some Royal Fusiliers came down with fourteen casualties on board, the result of Bolo fire from the mouth of the Vaga. Later, our temporary Brigadier came alongside in his coastal motor boat. He too, had been shot up from the same place, but unfortunately his person was still intact. Resplendent with cane and yellow wash-leather gloves, he climbed on board and insulted the Colonel in front of many men and swore as badly as I do when I'm really annoyed. This exhibition was not necessary to prove that he is a cavalryman of unknown quantity and quality.

Anyway, he ordered one gun and a platoon as escort to go out and shoot up the junction of the Dvina and Vaga. At the same time a platoon of Marines was sent up in a motor boat to make a landing and drive off the Bolo. The wretched Sawyer and his platoon clicked for this job and set off in the pouring rain for a destination unknown.

An hour later, our temporary Brigadier, still waving his arms like an infuriated politician, ordered a platoon of the Fusiliers to relieve our men. The latter returned at 5.30, and a quarter-of-an-hour later our barge was taken in tow and anchored in midstream.

Once again, we went to bed in our flea-bags, warm and comfortable; and what a relief to get a change of washing!

We left Beresnik to be held by the Fusiliers and some Russians. The latter were very windy; indeed, five of them tried to slink on board our barge and desert. That just shows how much heart they've got in the show.

*September 17th.*

The men are a sorry sight to look at. Their uniform is torn and dirty, boots in holes, puttees frayed, in fact thoroughly dishevelled but wonderfully cheery withal.

When we woke up this morning we found the barge gliding down this magnificent river; every moment taking us further from the monotonous villages of Mala Beresnik, Nijni Kitsa, Koslovo and Seltso. It was a truly wonderful feeling. Sitting in the sun on the leeward side, we preened ourselves and damned those villages to everlasting purgatory!

At 2.30 we squeezed our way past a barge stuck on the Charabritsa bar and lay off about a mile below the sandbank.

It was here that the monitor *Glowworm* stuck for two months. The day after she floated off, she blew up at Beresnik while trying to extinguish a fire on an ammunition barge. The latter blew up just as the *Glowworm* came alongside; I suppose her magazine went off.



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*September 18th.*

The day was spent in trying to refloat the stranded barges. Two had to be abandoned. In the evening we moved off and anchored off Sisskoe, where two Russian guns were landed.

*September 19th.*

Weather fine but cold. In the evening we passed Ust Pinega from the shore of which a raft appeared, propelled by a Ford car whose wheels had been converted into paddles. A most ingenious craft.

After dinner I saw the most wonderful Northern Lights. Away in the north, like a fountain of fire, the waves of iridescent light burst up behind the jet needles of the tree-tops, silhouetting each branch against the sky; like veils of rainbow silk dancing, changing, flitting; now spreading right across the sky in a fairy curtain, now vanishing, to spring to life again in yet more vivid brilliance straight overhead.

*September 20th.*

At lunch time, we could see the red and black funnels of a Cunarder. By tea time, we were passing the good ships *Czar* and *Czaritsa* and many naval craft. Having passed the Sabornaya Quay on our way to Rikiseka, a launch came alongside and ordered us back to Bakharitsa. Slept on board.

*September 21st.*

Disembarked very early in pouring rain and marched to our billets, which are quite comfortable for all ranks.

When I arrived, what do you think I found? Twenty-five letters and eight parcels from you all at home. It took me practically the rest of the day to read them!

*September 26th.*

S.S. *Czar* came alongside at 3.30 p.m., and we started loading; and how the men worked!! The last man was aboard at 8.30. A long bath. My Gawd, what luxury!!

*September 27th.*

Eggs and bacon for breakfast!! What more can a man want! The *Manitou* sailed at 11.30 with the band of the 67th on deck playing "Good bye-ee, don't sigh-ee," followed by the *Czaritsa*. We sailed at noon and watched the towers



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and minarets of Archangel fade into the distance, and wondered how long it would take the Bolsheviks to invest that unfortunate place.

*September 28th.* *267 miles at noon.*

A tug came alongside at 8 p.m. and took off our little Brigadier, Grogan, who has got to assume command of Murmansk vice General Maynard, who is very ill. I feel sorry for him having to go to that bloody place.

Naylor, Bill Smyth, Philip and I share a cabin. There is a Russian next door who stinks like a badger.

*September 29th.* *Noon.* 311 *miles.*

Very dirty weather but good for the catering department!

The wretched troops are paralytic in the bowels of the ship. I wonder if they will ever look like soldiers again.

The 43rd officers are all on their legs. A good many sailors were absent from lunch and dinner, especially the "Wavy Navy."

*September 30th.* *Noon.* 263 *miles.*

Calmer, thank Gawd. I could'nt have stuck another day like yesterday. The Captain went the rounds of the troop decks!! Serjeant Thorne has rendered his dentures into the arms of Neptune! I hope he will like them. Serjeant Thorne can scarcely articulate.

*October 1st.* *Noon.* 340 *miles.*

*October 2nd.* *Noon.* 338 *miles.*

*October 3rd.* *Noon.* 322 *miles.*

There is a heavy mist and the sea is calm at last. We are sheltered by Scotland and the Hebrides. At noon we had 267 miles to go to Liverpool.

*October 4th.* *Liverpool.*

And here endeth that lesson!

*R.J.N.N.* *Knotty Ash Camp,*

*October 7th.* *Liverpool.*

A thousand thanks for your letter of a thousand welcomes. It seemed amazing to open a letter, written only yesterday. Perhaps you would like to hear my side of the reception we got on the 4th.



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On landing from the *Czar* we were all given tea, wads and chocolate by the Navy and Army Canteen Board and Red Cross, God bless 'em. Then we formed up with "A" Company leading and marched to the Town Hall. There were a few people at the gates of the quay who clapped as we marched out. The public seem more enthusiastic over departing than returning troops! We formed up in front of the Town Hall and were addressed by the Mayor. There were a good many men of the Sherwood Foresters on strike duty billeted in the Town Hall who supplied the necessary voices for a cheer for the Russian Expeditionary Force. Otherwise, the spectators were very few and far between. On the march up to this camp, there were a good many hoots and jeers from the strikers, though some people seemed pleased to see us. The animosity of the corner boys was always aimed at the officers, a sure sign of Bolshevik tendencies.

However, we might have had bottles thrown at us, and I think on the whole that we were lucky to get off so free. We have spent our time gazing at the shop windows and wondering at the hum of the town after months of complete silence.

We have eaten abnormally, making up for the bully and maconochie. The next thing is leave, aye LEAVE!



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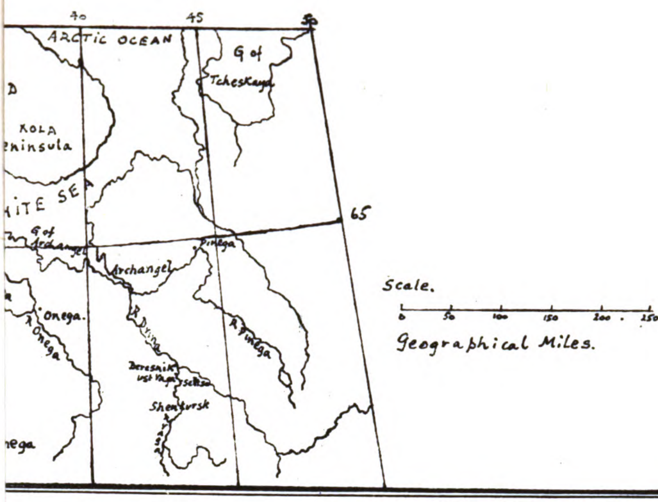


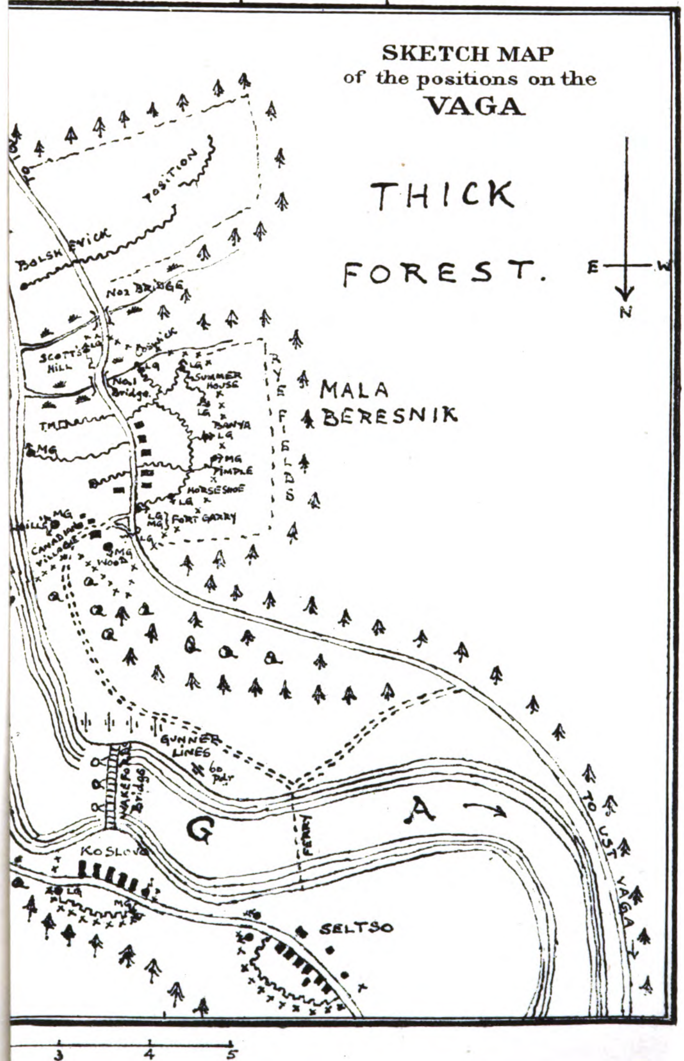


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